

JUDGE HOLDEN'S WAR DANCE:
MANIFEST DESTINY AND EVIL IN CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

by

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ABSTRACT

With an indisputably impressive collection of works to his name, Cormac McCarthy has emerged (among critical and commercial literary circles) as one of America's finest authors. Although each of his powerfully written works resonates with rich, disturbing imagery, *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West* stands alone, perhaps, as his masterpiece. At the center of this apocalyptic vision of the American West is Judge Holden, enigmatic albino giant, pedophile, philosopher and ruthless murderer, and though McCarthy critics have presented many fascinating and inventive interpretations of the judge, he remains, in many ways, inexplicably baffling. Nevertheless, in this thesis I present yet another analysis of Holden, unique in that it juxtaposes the influence of mid nineteenth century manifest destiny ideology against his disconcerting philosophy of war. I examine, in depth, Holden's desire to control his own fate by shattering (what he perceives to be) the chains of predestiny as well his ambition to "illuminate" Glanton's riders as to their significance as warriors in the history of human conduct. I also investigate the manner in which these ruthless outriders consistently validate Holden's beliefs through their savage butchery and inane ignorance, illustrating the defining factors that separate the typical mercenary scalp hunter from the judge. In order to express these differences convincingly, however, it is necessary that I present my analysis within a relevant historical framework; thus, I begin this thesis with a brief overview of the roots of manifest destiny and the manner in which it captured the American imagination during this period.

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CHAPTER 1: DISTORTIONS OF MANIFEST DESTINY IN *BLOOD MERIDIAN***Emerson, O'Sullivan and the Spirit of Romantic Idealism**

When Ralph Waldo Emerson addressed the Boston Mercantile Library Association on February 7, 1844 with his inspirational lecture, "The Young American," he explicitly expressed a spirit of optimism that was currently emerging throughout the young republic. In his lecture, Emerson attests that his countrymen "cannot look upon the freedom of [America] in [connexion] with its youth, without a presentiment that here shall laws and institutions exist on some scale of proportion to the majesty of nature" (156). These words resonate with a unique blend of European Romanticism and the excitement of imminent westward expansion as Emerson underscores America's unbounded future and limitless horizon. Americans, he states, are the inheritors of a Puritan desire to lay the foundations of a nation endowed with the spirit of promise, blessed by a "want of [the] feudal institutions" (169) that plague a more traditional Europe. "[I]t seems so easy," he contends, "for America to inspire and express the most expansive and humane spirit" (156).

As the leading nation of the age, Emerson contends, America is "new born, free, healthful, strong" and "should speak for the human race" (156), particularly because it is guided by a friendly and sublime destiny and thus assumes a forward look, unencumbered by a tainted national history or constraining traditions. It is a "country of the future . . . of beginnings, of projects, of vast designs, and expectations" (156). Furthermore, in the mid nineteenth century, a "time full of good signs" (161) in which to capitalize upon rapid advances in technology, trade and commerce, the young American must strive to develop the full potential of his country's vast natural and internal resources.

Recognizing the impact of rapid economic, social and technological advances upon American society, Emerson explains how these advances nourish a new spirit of exploration. He

notes the influence of new communications systems and improved transportation, of massive urban and industrial expansion and the consequent potential to solidify and strengthen the national economy. With these changes, he asserts, America's horizons are limited only by the imagination of the nation itself, steeped in beneficence and greatness. His views reinforce the American desire to become a nation bound only by the great oceans, a "bountiful continent . . . state on state, territory on territory, to the waves of the Pacific sea" (153). In short, the young American is one who, in "conspiring with the designs of the Spirit," will transform the nation into a more "excellent social state than history has recorded" (169).

This enthusiasm was not lost upon New York journalist John O'Sullivan, who founded the influential political journal *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in 1837. O'Sullivan's initial success in the publishing world fueled his ambitious call for the support and promotion of American ideas and values, and although his journal was initially conceived as a means of promoting Jacksonian political policies, it became a fertile breeding ground for the Romantic spirit of "young America" through the writings of Poe, Hawthorne, Whitman, Thoreau, and, of course, Emerson. Among this prestigious company, O'Sullivan claimed, Emerson captured the spirit of the nation most succinctly. Inspired by his ideals, the young journalist wrote of national identity and mission in a discourse permeated by a subtle sense of divine intervention and self-reliance, demonstrating his shared belief that America was guided by a divine spirit towards a providential destiny. For both writers, it remained the country of the future because of its youth, its ambition and its potential.

Although armed with these sentiments as early as 1839, O'Sullivan did not coin the term "manifest destiny" until 1845 in "The Great Nation of Futurity" (published in *The Democratic Review*), where he voices the opinion that America's destiny, as a nation, is unique among all others. O'Sullivan states:

America's national birth was the beginning of a new history, the formation and progress of an untried political system, which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only; and so far as regards the entire development of the natural rights of man, in moral, political, and national life, we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be *the great nation of futurity*. . . The expansive future is our arena . . . We are entering on its untrodden space, *with the truths of God in our minds*, beneficent objects in our hearts, and with a clear conscience unsullied by the past. We are the nation of human progress . . . *Providence is with us* . . . ("The Great Nation of Futurity," *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, VI November, 1839. 426-430, emphasis added)

For historian Robert Johannsen, this discourse reflects the spirit of Romantic idealism within America at the time:

O'Sullivan was simply saying that the nation's destiny was "obvious to the understanding." The belief that the United States was guided by a providential destiny, in other words, that the nation had a preordained, God-sanctioned mission to fulfill, formed a significant element in American Romantic thought. O'Sullivan's words reflected the boundlessness, the rejection of limits on national as well as individual development, and an impatience with anything that restrained or inhibited progress that characterized what the Romantics called the "spirit of the age." (10)

The term "manifest destiny" appeared again that year in O'Sullivan's article "Annexation," where, as a strong advocate for the annexation of the independent republic of Texas, he condemned European influences threatening to impede American interests by blocking annexation. This piece remains historically significant owing to O'Sullivan's comment that such influences were "checking the fulfillment of [America's] Manifest Destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of [its] yearly multiplying millions"

(qtd. in Weinberg: 31-32).

Religious Overtones of Manifest Destiny

As a potent mixture of Divine guidance, providential destiny and Republican ideology, “manifest destiny” permeated the national imagination, and many Americans began to view themselves as architects of a grand and new design, an experimental--if not spiritual--new form of government. According to historian Anders Stephanson, a unique combination of the “sacred and the secular” was “precisely the idea of ‘America’ as a unique mission and project [that] not only legitimated the enterprise but determined its whole meaning” (6). One disturbing result of this ideology, however, was the emergence of an ethnocentric sense of national superiority which inevitably spawned the popular opinion that America held a moral and spiritual responsibility to [initiate westward expansion and] “enlighten” the non-American peoples. Indeed, in its basest form, the discourse of manifest destiny contains biblical implications, particularly the notion that a chosen people (Americans) within a promised land (America) must achieve moral redemption or regeneration. Consequently, as America combined the “sacred and the secular” on a national, political and ideological level, the notion of its providential destiny became entrenched in its national identity.

This destiny, however, is framed by a covenant between God and the chosen people that is in no way absolute or predetermined. Stephanson notes that:

A massive responsibility is thus placed upon the chosen, for nothing less than the future of the world is in balance. Anxiety, guilt, and relentless self-inspection are combined here productively with an ever-present imperative to intervene righteously in the world to transform it. (8)

This covenant, then, marks not only the destiny of the chosen people, but by extension, all peoples, for the chosen must enlighten through example. Consequently, as Emerson calls for

“young Americans” to assume their rightful position as leaders in a world arena, he lays the foundation for America as the land of the chosen; subsequently, his countrymen take upon themselves the enormous responsibility to illuminate the world through their political, philosophical and ideological assumptions.

Criticisms of Manifest Destiny

As well-intentioned as Emerson's and O'Sullivan's ambitions were, however, various historians allege that--from various perspectives--manifest destiny concealed an obscene racial prejudice hidden behind a façade of moral responsibility, that beneath the optical illusion of its democratic paradigms and concepts, it ultimately remained a tool for political land expansion policies, a blatant means of furthering economic power, of enhancing the rapid urbanization in the east through expansion in the west, and of concealing an ever-widening breach between the rich and the poor by “evicting” the poor and sending them west. Indeed, manifest destiny, as Johannsen notes, was quickly aligned with westward expansion:

Although destiny and mission have a pedigree that predates the nation itself, it was not until the early nineteenth century that profound changes in American life were combined with the idealism of the nation's revolutionary beginnings and with currents of European Romanticism to produce a popular romantic nationalism that gave new meaning to the idea of progress. Fundamental to the feelings of national superiority generated by romantic nationalism was the conviction that American territorial expansion was inevitable, that the nation's providential destiny--its Manifest Destiny--decreed an extension of the ideals of its founding charter throughout the entire continent. . . . Thus, Manifest Destiny became and has remained virtually synonymous with territorial expansion. (3)

As an “outspoken champion of Andrew Jackson's Romantic democracy,” one who “like

so many others of his generation . . . saw the hand of Providence in the workings of the majority” (Johannsen 7), O’Sullivan conceived of America’s manifest destiny as resonant with moral and religious responsibility: “[M]ission and expansion were inseparably linked by manifest destiny” (Johannsen 10). O’Sullivan had no moral compunction in aligning manifest destiny with Emerson’s “sublime friendly Destiny” or promoting a moral responsibility to expand westward, yet he initially viewed this expansion as peaceful. His perspective underwent a radical shift, however, with Polk’s ascension to the presidency and the instigation of politically sanctioned “land grabbing” policies during the mid 1840’s. As his political sympathies shifted, O’Sullivan’s notion of a “far reaching . . . boundless future” delineated only by a “moral law of equality” began to disintegrate. Quite suddenly, the outspoken journalist had become a staunch supporter of the immediate, and if necessary, *violent* annexation of Texas.

McCarthy critic, Patrick W. Shaw, addresses some of the implications of Texas annexation by observing the significance of mid nineteenth century East-West conflicts between various American states, conflicts orbiting around a struggle for power and influence that annexation would bring to the nation. He aligns the death of McCarthy’s kid with the death of the American West, with the gradual disappearance of its wide open space and with the inevitable industrialization of the nation. He also notes that “while McCarthy does not textually develop an East-West conflict, he conveys it through the historicity that fills the seventeen-year narrative void” (116). Shaw also comments upon the effects of eastern Capitalism upon the dying western landscape:

. . . the baneful Eastern influence on the Western plains is evident. In 1861, the year in which we last see the kid prior to his reappearance on the Llano Estacado, millions of buffalo still roamed, the plains indians still thrived, and the encroachment of the industrial East was still minimal. Like the kid, the trans-Mississippi frontier was yet youthful,

tough, and essentially natural. By 1878, however, the great buffalo herds had been eliminated to feed the Eastern hide trade, the tribes had been starved into submission, and piles of bleached bones were the sole legacy of both. These bones in turn were collected by the bone pickers such as Elrod, converted to fertilizer, and soon followed the hides across the Mississippi to nourish Capitalist greed and Eastern gardens. The history of this death trade is nicely symbolized in the kid's destination when he leaves the buffalo plains to encounter Judge Holden on the jakes. (116)

For Shaw, McCarthy illustrates the degeneration of the violent world of the filibuster and the scalp hunter by emphasizing the implications of the encroaching East; indeed, McCarthy places the kid's final agony and the judge's ongoing ecstasy in Fort Griffin, a location that symbolizes both the decline of the American West *and* the violent history of Texas itself.

In addition to Shaw's observations, however, I believe that McCarthy chooses Fort Griffin as a suitable location for the conclusion of his novel because it aptly symbolizes the ramifications of excessive and unchecked manifest destiny, symbolizes the utter exploitation and subsequent devastation produced by radical distortions of Emerson's and O'Sullivan's initial concepts. In order to understand the full intent of McCarthy's final devastating scene (which I will discuss below), therefore, one that *brings into focus all of the novel's thematic discourse on evil*, it is necessary to understand--rather extensively--the political and moral implications of manifest destiny particular to the Texas-Mexico border area of this period. With this knowledge, one is well equipped to understand the motivations, and by extension, the atrocious behaviour, of McCarthy's characters.

Racist Overtones Behind Texas Annexation

Originally created as a northern Mexican state comprised primarily of no man's land, Texas was meant to enhance Mexican defense against any unwarranted American expansion.

Nevertheless, this state contained American settlers eager to subvert Mexican sovereignty as early as the 1820's and, following a bloody but inconclusive military struggle, it declared its independence in 1836.¹ Although its initial application for membership within the American Union was rejected by the American Congress, annexation constituted the cornerstone of Polk's westward expansion policies in the 1840's.² Recognizing a growing fear of European encroachment and the potential possibility of Texas seeking alliance with foreign nations, Polk followed Tyler's advice and used his increasing influence in Congress to award Texas full membership into the American Union by October 13, 1845. Congress had granted its approval after voters approved terms of annexation and state constitution.³

Predictably, tensions with Mexico--which had never officially recognized Texan independence--increased dramatically, and open talk of war became a dominant topic in Congress. In the Cabinet, Secretary of State James Buchanan proposed that a declaration be sent to foreign governments stating that war with Mexico was not meant, in any way, as an act of "dismemberment" but rather, as an action of self-defense on the part of the United States. Polk, however, quickly rejected this idea, claiming that, although the war would not be one of conquest, "it was clear that in making peace [America] would if practicable obtain California and such other portion of the Mexican territory as would be sufficient to indemnify [its] claimants on Mexico and to defray the expenses of war" (qtd. in Merk:107).

During these political machinations, the "expenses of war" and the economic issues behind Texas annexation became increasingly significant, and with Polk's rapid expansion in the 1840's, America entered a period of sectionalism between the North and the South, whose philosophical and political ideologies--as well as economic means--differed radically. Although the Missouri Compromise (1820) had served to defer any open conflicts in the early part of the century, Polk's policies triggered enormous anxiety: a strong sense of nationalism permeated the

urban North but remained absent in the fiercely independent rural South, where the belief that individuals states held the right to secede from the Union still prevailed. In particular, the South felt a pressure to sustain the level of Northern land expansion in order to maintain a competitive political and economic edge: whoever annexed the most territories would, ultimately, gain massive potential for profit and thus, the economic means of advancing its military. For the South, annexation also anticipated the extension of slavery towards the Pacific and into Central America, where territories such as Cuba and Nicaragua held potential as slave trading areas. By mid-century, the Democrats (who favored Jacksonian policies of minimal governmental interference) had come into conflict with the Whigs, and as (Jackson-supporter) Polk moved into power, the established states of the East urgently underlined the enormous economic benefits in settling new colonies, particularly Texas. Consequently, a general scramble for new sources of economic growth through land expansion began to dominate the national political consciousness, but the 1850's Union interests had increased so dramatically that the South existed in a state of tense defiance regarding the potential loss of its traditions, its land, and its economic power, which relied so heavily upon the slave trading system.

Polk's political activities and the increasing influence of sectionalism during this period influenced O'Sullivan to publish a variety of articles supporting annexation and appealing to young America, with its "providentially sanctioned right of destiny" (one that "superseded all claims that looked to history and law, providing a 'higher' law which would govern U.S. behaviour" [Johannsen 9]) to fulfill its mission of westward expansion. His decision to engage in war against Mexico, however, was met with radically mixed views ranging from apprehension to elation, and many Americans remained quite cautious about exposing their opinions until victory was, if not a certainty, then at least a probability.⁴

As the war gained momentum, intense racial discrimination increased on both sides of the

border and the motivations behind the president's political maneuvering grew confusing. A disconcerting agenda began to emerge as it became increasingly clear that westward expansion and rapid land acquisition were as racially and economically motivated as providentially sanctioned. On May 13, 1846, for instance, Charles DeMorse, editor of *The Northern Standard* (Clarksville, Texas), published the following editorial:

At least we have a real "sure enough" war on hand; something to warm the blood, and draw out national enthusiasm. It seems that the "Magnanimous Mexican Nation" has at last come out of its chaparral of wordy diplomacy, treachery, meanness and bombast, and concluded for a little while, *to act like white people*. There is at last--our pulses beat quickly with the thought--an opportunity to pay off a little of the debt of vengeance which has been accumulating since the massacre of the Alamo. We trust that every man of our army, as he points his rifle and thrusts his bayonet, will think of his countrymen martyred at the Alamo, at Goliad, and at Mier, whose blood yet cries aloud from the ground for remembrance and vengeance, and taking a little closer aim or giving a little stronger thrust, will give his blow in *his country's cause and an additional "God speed."* (qtd. in Wallace: 107, emphasis added).

With blood in the air, the public perception of westward expansion took on a much darker quality than had originally been intentioned by Emerson or O'Sullivan, and once O'Sullivan's original vision of Texas annexation through the establishment of equality with Mexico (i.e., free-trade and the lifting of economic restraints or sanctions) began to diminish, many "young Americans" who reached towards a "boundless future" no longer concerned themselves primarily with "moral law[s] of equity," for this vision had been replaced by an increasingly racist and ethnocentric agenda. The West, however, continued to capture the national imagination (nourished by the works of writers such as Emerson and O'Sullivan) and the American vision

became one of infinite journey and expansion. Texas annexation and the subsequent drive towards the California gold fields were the inevitable results of a nation poised to embrace a predestiny based upon accumulation and domination; as Stephanson notes, “[s]pace itself, in a way, became the outside counterpoint for the projection of the national self” (29).

Filibustering and Manifest Destiny

With the threat of war against Mexico, a new perspective towards Westward expansion emerged in America, one fueled by an underlying ideology of ethnocentric superiority--the seeds of a grossly distorted manifest destiny. Opportunists eager to exploit Polk’s expansion policies were often left unchecked, particularly in the Texas/Mexico border area where privately funded military expeditions became a commonplace activity.⁵ Collectively, these expeditions became known as “filibustering,” with the term first appearing in 1850. In reality, filibustering was a rather conservative label for radically violent and illegal military behaviour; however, historian D.W. Meinig observes that it--in addition to various politically *sanctioned* military expeditions--it played a key role in attaining America’s vast empire, both on the North American continent and overseas (209). Furthermore, Meinig alleges, filibustering epitomized the spirit of early American expansion, which was not only accompanied by, but dependent upon, violence.

Despite its illegal status, many influential political figures frequently sustained filibustering activity through their implicit consent and encouragement. Many Americans were convinced that vast financial opportunities lay just south of the American border in areas such as Sonora and Chihuahua, where Mexican residents were eager to politically align themselves with any foreign power that would intervene on their behalf and stop the rampant violence that plagued their environment. Internal political chaos within Mexico City contributed to the destabilization of the northern states, which in turn, resulted in the dramatic failure of various governmental attempts to establish economically stable military colonies throughout the north

(Martinez, *Borderlands* 46-47). Consequently, the filibuster movement reached its peak in the mid 1850's, when opportunists (aware of Mexico's lack of northern political authority) instigated a series of bizarre and violent attempts to overthrow the governments of Coahuila, Sonora and Chihuahua.

During this period, America was undergoing a series of rapid socioeconomic and political changes that dramatically affected the common perception of manifest destiny. Rapid urbanization in the North, scientific developments in communications and military technology, the nation's sectional dilemma over the issue of slavery, increasing immigration (the national population had quadrupled in less than fifty years) and the consequent economic division between classes fed a national desire for financial profit through westward expansion, by military means if necessary. These influences also affected the rate of filibustering activity, often viewed as a means of advancing one's career through rapid promotion and consistently lucrative plundering. Indeed, many conceived of the typical filibustering expedition as a glorified American Foreign Legion with promises of fortune and/or glory while others were merely free-booting opportunists looking for the quickest road to monetary gain.⁶ There were also genuine believers in some sort of radically distorted manifest destiny. One common undercurrent behind these diverse motivations was the knowledge that many of the areas targeted by each of these groups maintained the practice of slavery or were potentially capable of supporting a slave labour system; consequently, as North/South tensions mounted, "more Southerners concluded that filibustering might provide their salvation" (May 160). From an international perspective, however, filibustering was frequently--and predictably--equated with modern day piracy (May 154), and though most historians agree that it is difficult to clearly delineate any *national* agenda behind the filibustering movement (as each faction hailed from different locales and retained various needs, ambitions and desires), it is clear that, as a practice, filibustering was enormously

controversial both within and outside of America.

Despite this reputation, there was an element of spiritual justification behind many filibustering activities: driven by the quasi-religious overtones and sense of moral responsibility that manifest destiny engendered, many filibusters justified their behaviour as obligatory to “Young America,” the “country of the future.” In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy depicts the disconcertingly religious self-righteousness of the filibuster through Captain White’s parched followers who, on their disastrous expedition into northern Mexico, find themselves lost and alone in an unforgiving landscape. McCarthy writes:

... a man named Hayward prayed for rain.

He prayed: Almighty God, if it aint too far out of the way of things in your eternal plan do you reckon we could have a little rain down here.

Pray it up, some called, and kneeling he cried out among the thunder and the wind:

Lord we are dried to jerky down here. Just a few drops for some old boys out here on the prairie and a long way from home.

Amen, they said, and catching up their mounts they rode on. (47)

McCarthy’s filibusters view themselves as purveyors of a mission of enlightenment with the hand of Divine guidance leading their way, yet foreshadowing their quasi-religious distortion of manifest destiny is the appearance of the old Mennonite, an ephemeral soothsayer who augurs doom and prophesies White’s fate: “He turns to them. His eyes are wet, he speaks slowly. The wrath of God lies sleeping. It was hid a million years before men were and only men have the power to wake it. Hell aint half full. Hear me. Ye carry a war of a madman’s making onto a foreign land. Ye’ll wake more than the dogs” (McCarthy 40)--clearly an indication that filibustering was, from at least one perspective, simply the war-making of madmen.

Whatever the motivation, conducting privately sponsored military campaigns into foreign

territories (despite six Congressional interventions between 1794 and 1838) continued, becoming an acceptable means of expanding the burgeoning American empire, for the initial spark of the filibuster movement against Spanish territories and/or colonies had begun early in the nineteenth century and, for many, had become implicitly acceptable through both time and practice.⁷

Captain White: Representative of the Texas Filibuster

With the Texan political turmoil of 1835-1836, many American newcomers poured into the Southwest, bringing with them a sense of urgency concerning American freedom from Mexican sovereignty. Among these newcomers, filibusters played an influential role in the eventual secession of Texas. By October of 1836, the newly independent republic had elected Sam Houston as its first president and by 1848-49 (the time period roughly corresponding to the kid's affiliation with Captain White's doomed expedition), filibusters--fueled by the spirit of Texan independence--had even attempted to establish an independent Republic of the Sierra Madre in northern Mexico.⁸ American leniency towards offending filibusters (such as William Walker) nourished the Mexican belief that filibustering was, if not explicitly then implicitly, supported by American authorities, and the strong racial tension that existed between Americans and Mexicans, particularly following the War of 1846 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, flourished (Martinez, *Troublesome Border* 55). As a result, filibusters in the Texas-Mexico border area operated within an extremely complex web of interracial relations: despite the Mexican fear of Apache raiding parties, these two traditional enemies periodically aided one another in violent expeditions aimed against isolated Texan settlements, thus justifying, in the eyes of many Americans, some of the violence and exploitation that accompanied Polk's westward expansion.

McCarthy's arrogant (and aptly named) Captain White is in many ways typical of the Southwestern filibuster who justified his behaviour through a distorted vision of manifest

destiny. Historically, radical interpretations of O'Sullivan's original concept substantially diminished the problem of finding willing volunteers, for under the guise of manifest destiny, leaders could indoctrinate those who were consumed by the idealistic belief that filibustering was an acceptable extension of O'Sullivan's and Emerson's ideals. Filibustering was conveniently portrayed, by these leaders, as the moral responsibility of a nation (operating under Divine guidance) to illuminate "primitive" races.

Perhaps the most disconcerting undercurrent common to many individual filibustering factions, however, was the racial bigotry that stemmed from this sense of religious and moral self-righteousness. In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy depicts this morally righteous racism most effectively through White's propagandistic rhetoric. During his indoctrination speech for the newly recruited kid, the "Captain" presents his highly ethnocentric views, carefully emphasizing the enormous racial, religious and moral breaches between Americans and Mexicans. He states:

What we are dealing with . . . is a race of degenerates. A mongrel race, little better than niggers. And maybe no better. There is no government in Mexico. Hell, there's no God in Mexico. Never will be. We are dealing with a people manifestly incapable of governing themselves. And do you know what happens with people who cannot govern themselves? That's right. Others come in to govern for them. (McCarthy 34)

The remainder of White's speech, which is riddled with insults against Mexican government officials ("thieves and imbeciles") and the French ("toadeaters"), blatantly fuses together an urgency for westward expansion and an intense racism under the guise of manifest destiny. Clearly, White has the intellectual capacity to convince his followers that their journey is one of moral responsibility and he is clever enough to employ manipulative psychology in recruiting followers such as the kid (whom he appeals to on the grounds of the kid's personal background and heritage), yet this "moral responsibility" represents an extremely distorted rationale that

mixes racism, the ideology of manifest destiny and manipulative psychology. White states:

You werent with the Volunteers at Monterrey were you? . . . Bravest bunch of men under fire I believe I ever saw. I suppose more men from Tennessee bled and died on the fields in northern Mexico than from any other state. Did you know that? . . . They were sold out. Fought and died down there in that desert and then they were sold out by their own country. . . . We fought for it. Lost friends and brothers down there. And then by God if we didnt give it back. Back to a bunch of barbarians that even the most biased in their favor will admit have no least notion in God's earth or honor or justice or the meaning of republican government. . . . What kind of people are these? (McCarthy 33)

Through his propagandistic discourse and his indoctrination of the kid, White reflects the confusion engendered by the historical diversity of the filibuster movement: for many, filibustering activity was simply piratical exploitation of weaker territories, yet for others it was revenge for the "volunteers" who "bled and died on the fields in northern Mexico," or even implicit politically sanctioned invasions in the name of America's providential destiny. White illustrates this confusing diversity remarkably well. Initially, he expresses praise for the imminent government support behind his cause . . .

Right now they are forming in Washington a commission to come out here and draw up the boundary lines between our country and Mexico. I don't think there's any question that ultimately Sonora will become a United States territory. Guaymas is a US port. Americans will be able to get to California without having to pass through our benighted sister republic and our citizens will be protected at last from the notorious packs of cut-throats presently infesting the routes which they are obliged to travel. . . . We have the tacit support of Governor Burnett of California. (McCarthy 34)

Following this praise, however, the "Captain" actively criticizes the government for its distinct

lack of intervention: “Unless Americans act, people like you and me who take their country seriously while those mollycoddles in Washington sit on their hindsides, unless we act, Mexico--and I mean the whole of the country--will one day fly a European flag” (McCarthy 35). This oscillating argument and manipulative rhetoric accurately display the extreme diversity of the political and social motivations behind filibustering activity during this period.

Whether or not White actually believes any of his own rhetoric, however, is irrelevant: his goal, by whatever means, is to exploit and plunder under the guise of manifest destiny. Although he appeals to McCarthy’s kid on a number of different levels (“There will be a section of land for every man in my company . . .” [McCarthy 34] and “I don’t think you’re the sort of chap to abandon a land that Americans fought and died for . . .” [McCarthy 34-35]), White’s strategy remains consistent: he psychologically manipulates the imagination of the new recruit by capitalizing upon the recruit’s ignorance of the political machinations behind Polk’s expansion policies *and* through the ideology of manifest destiny, which incorporates a moral responsibility for westward expansion. Indeed, from his first appearance, White plays upon the ignorance of the kid by emphasizing his lack of knowledge regarding the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1847) and the intricate political machinations between Mexico and Texas following the war (McCarthy 33).⁹

White’s shifting rhetoric is, I believe, extremely significant, for it simultaneously converts potential recruits while confusing any of McCarthy’s readers who intend to ascertain some sort of national or universal motivating factor behind filibustering. By creating a character who refuses to fit into a stereotypical representation of the American filibuster, McCarthy demonstrates a thorough understanding of the political and social discord intrinsic to the movement. More importantly, he emphasizes the radical distortion of manifest destiny that the filibuster relies upon: as a twisted version of Virgil, White engineers the first stage of the kid’s

journey into the ideology of manifest destiny, and his ability to combine psychology, politics, religious fervor and greed with revenge as means of motivation reflects the qualities of many young American “adventurers” who embarked upon privately sponsored military invasions during this period. In short, White illustrates the disconcerting fact that filibustering was, to a large degree, implicitly encouraged within many of the larger mid nineteenth century American social and political arenas, despite its obvious exploitative brutality against colored races.

McCarthy, however, presents the filibuster as an idealist blinded by ethnocentricity. White literally fails to recognize the imminent threat of the approaching Comanche raiding party that decimates his band because he is blinded by an ethnocentric ignorance and inherently racist sense of superiority that stems from Emerson’s original concept of the “young American.”¹⁰ Although he uses propagandistic rhetoric as his primary means of recruiting followers, White remains unconvincing as an inheritor of Emerson’s original ideals. Exploiting his apparent position as the possessor of an awesome responsibility to enlighten non-Americans culturally, politically, religiously or philosophically, he remains driven by feelings of superiority that inspire him to recklessly place his men within range of a far more determined military force. Ultimately, he demonstrates buffoon-like behaviour by showing that he is incapable of survival in McCarthy’s harsh Western landscape and his sickening decapitation (echoing that of the historical filibuster Henry Crabb), is an apt (if degrading) demise.

The Scalp Industry in Northern Mexico

By allowing the kid to shift effortlessly between various types of lawless activity within his landscape, McCarthy accurately recreates the chaotic atmosphere of the historical scalp hunter’s world. More importantly, however, he portrays the manner in which many types of illegal American activities were closely related during this period. As the kid shifts from filibuster to scalp hunter through the mere happenstance of his chance survival at the hands of

the raiding Comanche party, it becomes painstakingly clear that the lines of morality between illegal filibustering (in the name of manifest destiny), legal scalp hunting and wanton murder are significantly blurred in his radically lawless environment.

But of all of the violence that occurs in *Blood Meridian*, the art of scalp-hunting is perhaps the most shocking.¹¹ For the most part, McCarthy's novel occurs between 1848-1850, a period in which the scalp industry in the Texas-Mexico border area thrived, and as John Sepich notes, one in which the "northern Mexican state of Chihuahua, in its attempt to break the cycle of Indian incursions, hire[d] Anglo aliens to kill the raiders" (94). This was also a period in which the Comanche and Apache nations suffered enormous casualties from various epidemics (introduced by gold seekers on the way to California) while simultaneously reaching the peak of their raiding activities into northern Mexico, particularly in the states of Sonora, Durango and Chihuahua.

Originally, Sonora instigated the legalization of scalp hunting in 1835 by offering one hundred pesos for the scalp of any adult Apache male, but by the 1840's, an extremely aggressive scalping campaign had commenced within many of its neighboring states.¹² According to historian J. Molinardo, the legalization of scalping was temporarily suspended in early 1840, but regained its legal status by 1841 due to the increasing intensity of Indian raiding parties (by 1843 raiding activities in Chihuahua had even begun *within* the capital itself) ("The Scalp Industry" n.pag.). Molinardo also alleges that the Apache were actually "harvesting" victims by leaving just enough survivors and resources to ensure recovery before any subsequent raids ("The Scalp Industry").

In addition to the terror engendered by these Apache raiding parties, there was constant political tension between Chihuahua and Sonora, primarily due to the Chihuahuan government's offer of stipends to various Apache bands on condition that these bands redirect their raiding

activities towards the Comanche. When the Apache took the stipends and unexpectedly redirected their energies towards Sonora, however, the Chihuahuan government effectively became guilty of bribing Indians to attack fellow Mexicans. Learning from this expensive mistake, government officials made an extremely lucrative public offer to any mercenary guerrilla fighters brave enough to stop Indian raiding activities and, as William B. Griffin notes, “Chihuahua’s peace reserve effort of the decade was in effect dead by spring 1845” (209). By 1847 (roughly the period in which the historical Glanton Gang ravaged the Texas-Mexico border area), the Chihuahuan state legislature had raised the bounty on male braves to two hundred dollars and on May 25, 1849, it had passed “The Fifth Law,” which “approved the purchase of Apache prisoners and scalps and authorized the executive arm of government to make contracts (soon called ‘blood contracts’--*contratas de sangre*) with either Mexican nationals or foreigners to organize armed parties to carry war to the Apaches” (Griffin 224). Ultimately, however, this law was a disastrous mistake that ended the lives of many innocent Mexicans whose scalps resembled those of the Apache, and as hired scalp hunters decimated both the Indian and Mexican population, the “expense to the public coffers became exorbitant, and [the law] wasted funds required elsewhere on the frontier” (Griffin 224).

Mexico felt a marked decrease in Indian violence with the onset of the War of 1846-48 as the presence of American soldiers discouraged raiding activity, but following the end of the war and the instigation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1847, various northern Mexican states reinstated the legalization of scalp hunting. Increasingly larger bounties were consistently placed upon both dead and live Indians and the city of Chihuahua, desperate to stop Indian violence, once again invited all American, Mexican, and Indian scalp hunters to protect its citizens (Richardson, *Comanche* 202).¹³ Consequently, opportunists such as James Kirker and John Joel Glanton entered the scalping arena in northern Mexico with expectations of quick financial profit.

As Sepich notes, "A group of Indian hunters averaging about fifty men and paid two hundred dollars a scalp would have to bring only four scalps into Chihuahua City in order to exceed the army's [yearly] rate of pay, and for work not much more hazardous than the army's" (95).¹⁴

In this thriving industry, opportunists such as Kirker and Glanton became the scourge of northern Mexico, particularly because these indiscriminate marauders often switched alliances according to monetary gain. Northern Mexico existed in a state of utter chaos and, in addition to numerous Mexicans, many agriculturally based Indian tribes such as the Yuma, often fell victim to scalp-hunters who preyed upon tribes gathered along fertile areas near the Rio Grande. Mexican officials, in fact, often alleged that Indian activity actually *increased* whenever scalp hunting parties passed through specific regions, often leading to violent tensions between the Mexican army and predators such as Glanton.

The scalp industry reached its zenith in the winter of 1849 when Glanton and his peers capitalized upon Comanche and Apache movement down from the mountains onto the plains. This fateful emigration was caused by a desperate shortage of food. By the following spring, "Chihuahua alone had paid out over \$17,000 to scalp hunters" and "[M]any of the Mexican states found that they did not have the money to pay the scalping parties or that the expenditures were growing to a point where they would soon be bankrupt" (Molinardo, "The Scalp Industry"). Predictably, the abundance of captured scalps and receipts led to a scarcity of victims and by 1850 the industry was in rapid decline. By this time, many of the more successful predators had already fallen afoul of the Mexican law and found prices upon their own heads, a strong motivation to leave the region.

Captain John Joel Glanton and Manifest Destiny

Like many of his guerrilla fighting peers, the historical John Glanton was a composite of good and evil and numerous accounts of his background exist, many of which remain unverified

yet colorfully fascinating. According to Ralph Smith, he was reputed to have been part Cherokee, an outlaw and former convict from Tennessee, and the former protégé of Texas Ranger Captain Mabry “Mustang” Gray (“Glanton” 13-14). In 1835, the sixteen-year old Glanton sided with American colonists in a battle against the Mexican army at Gonzales that began the open hostilities between Texans and Mexicans which eventually sealed Texan independence. By 1846, he was serving under both Major Michael H. Chevallié and John C. Hays as an Indian fighter on the Texas frontier until he and his companions were officially discharged. By January of 1847, however, Glanton had responded to a new call for Rangers and, once again under Chevallié, contracted out with the Chihuahuan government to scalp the Apache. Smith alleges that, following his arrest in 1848 for the murder of an infantryman in San Antonio, Glanton left his wife, Joaquina Menchaca Glanton, for the gold fields of California (15)--the period in which McCarthy recreates his controversial exploits.

Perhaps the most colorful (but historically questionable) account of Glanton comes from the reminiscence of Samuel Chamberlain, a deserter from the Mexican War who recorded his adventures with the historical Glanton Gang in *My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue*. In his account, Chamberlain describes his tenure with “the John Glanton of the San Antonio Bexar Exchange Tragedy” (304), recounting various escapades and the eventual downfall of Glanton’s gang at the Yuma ferry crossing on the lower Gila (April 23, 1850). According to Chamberlain, Glanton (b. South Carolina) emigrated to Texas as a young man and married an orphan who was subsequently kidnapped and murdered by a Lipan raiding party; thereafter, he began a personal campaign of revenge which resulted in banishment by President Sam Houston. Despite his outlaw status, however, Glanton became a Texas Ranger who was renowned for his violent temper during the Mexican War and when Don D. José Urrea, Governor of Sonora, initiated an offer of fifty dollars for the retrieval of male adult Apache scalps (and a one thousand dollar

reward for that of the Apache Chief Santana) in 1849, he moved into northern Mexico to begin his career as a professional scalp hunter.

By June of that year, Glanton had collected a motley crew of American gold-seekers, Mexicans, French Canadians, African Americans, and Indians willing to take Urrea's offer with a stipulation that a twenty-five hundred dollar allowance be paid out in advance. After receiving his money, Glanton immediately set out for Sierra de Terrenates and began a series of infamous scalp hunting campaigns along the Rio Grande, often extending into Texas itself. Molinaro notes that, following the success of Glanton's first expedition, authorities in Chihuahua City rewarded him with \$1,350 and an additional \$500 for future campaigns, and that with such rich compensation, he consistently returned to the capital in order to redeem his "receipts" ("The Scalp Industry"). By December of 1849, the Chihuahuan government had appropriated a \$2000 fund to encourage Glanton's future raiding expeditions, but he was eventually murdered by a group of Yuma Indians who had been badly treated by his gang: the gang had taken possession of a Yuma ferry crossing situated on the lower Gila, a profitable enterprise given the enormous numbers of gold seekers passing through on their way to the fields of California.

These are the events fictionalized within *Blood Meridian*, and they serve to illuminate any analysis of both Glanton and his gang. Indeed, by depicting a variety of historically verified occurrences (the gang pursuing a party of Apache braves to Laguna de Guzman; the scalping of the old Indian hag in Laguna de Guzman; the chasing of Chief Gómez through the Conchos Valley into Texas; the gift from Governor Trías of Sonora [September 01, 1849] for the furnishing of Apache scalps; Glanton's violent encounter with Mexican Colonel Elías Gonzáles; and the decimation of his gang at the Yuma ferry crossing in 1850), McCarthy creates a highly accurate historical context for his novel.

Although McCarthy's Glanton does not espouse the ideology of manifest destiny in

terms as broad or explicit as White's, he is nevertheless an American who demonstrates a disconcerting sense of ethnocentric superiority as he engages in questionable activities upon foreign soil. Glanton also resembles his filibustering counterpart, however, in that he blatantly fails as a stereotype: again, McCarthy aptly illustrates the complexities both of the historical guerrilla fighter and the situation in which he finds himself through fiction as Glanton displays signs of both utter evil and melancholic resignation, shifting back and forth between hyper-racist scalp hunter and victim of circumstance. In one scene, he sits alone astride his horse, on a

. . . soil where [he] was subject to arrest. He rode out alone on the desert and sat the horse and he and the horse and the dog looked out across the rolling scrubland and barren peppercorn hills and the mountains and the flatbrush country and running plain beyond where four hundred miles to the east were the wife and child that he would not see again. His shadow grew long before him on the banded wash of sand. He would not follow.

(McCarthy 172)

As a melancholic victim of fate pondering over his past life and the abandoned possibilities of a more settled and family-oriented existence, Glanton approaches sympathetic status.

Immediately following this wistful demonstration (before the reader can establish any prolonged empathy), however, McCarthy has Glanton conduct a devastating raid upon a camp of innocent Indians:

On the eve of that day they crouched about the fire where it hissed in a softly falling rain and they ran balls and cut patches as if the fate of the aborigines had been cast into shape by some other agency altogether. As if such destinies were prefigured in the very rock for those with eyes to read. . . . They approached those wretched pavilions in the long light of the day's failing . . . When the first dogs barked Glanton rowled his horse forward . . . [The natives] stood dumb, barefoot . . . At the first fire a dozen of them crumpled and

fell. The others had begun to run, old people flinging up their hands, children tottering and blinking in the pistolfire. . . . Long past dark that night . . . a party of women . . . returned to the village and wandered howling through the ruins. . . . An old woman knelt at the blackened stones . . . All about her the dead lay with their peeled skulls like polyps bluely wet or luminescent melons cooling on some mesa of the moon. (McCarthy 173-174)

If Glanton were merely the instigator of such anguish, he would be difficult to sympathize with to *any* degree, but he is also a man who adopts and gains the devotion of a stray dog (thus demonstrating an affinity with animals) and one who is not immune to the beauty of the nature that surrounds him:

They rode on into the mountains and their way took them through high pine forests . . . where the fallen leaves lay like golden disclets in the damp black trail. The leaves shifted in a million spangles down the pale corridors and Glanton took one and turned it like a tiny fan by its stem and held it and let it fall and its perfection was not lost on him.

(McCarthy 136)

By recreating the historical Glanton as such a deeply complex and utterly evil yet troubled soul, McCarthy effectively demonstrates the futility of stereotyping the American profiteer in mid nineteenth century northern Mexico.

It is for this very reason that the ideology of manifest destiny resonates so powerfully through Glanton in *Blood Meridian*, for McCarthy portrays the extreme ethnocentricity and racism of the guerrilla scalp hunter in addition to more humane characteristics. Throughout these periodic indications of compassion, Glanton's mission remains--quite disconcertingly--one of profit through justification: he does not view colored races in the same terms as he views the white American, and this attitude (as with White's) appears as a gross distortion of Emerson's and O'Sullivan's original concept of westward expansion and the moral responsibility of the

“young American” to enlighten more “primitive” races. A telling indication of Glanton’s extreme ethnocentricity occurs when his gang encounters Colonel Garcia of Sonora:

The Mexicans pressed about with their hands outstretched for tobacco and Glanton and the colonel exchanged rudimentary civilities and Glanton pushed on through that importunate horde. They were of another nation, those riders, and all that land to the south out of which they’d originated and whatever lands to the east toward which they were bound were dead to him and both the ground and any sojourners upon it remote and arguable of substance. (McCarthy 244)

For Glanton, the art of scalping Mexicans or Indians is not an act of brutality against his fellow human beings but rather an effective means of monetary profit through the exploitation of human “meatcamp[s]” (McCarthy 97) and “crazylookin bunch[es] of niggers” (McCarthy 255).

Despite his rampant violence and seemingly pointless destination, he retains his reluctance to victimize the white man due to his ethnocentric attitude: at the ruins of Santa Rita Del Cobre, Glanton tells the inhabitants to “Come out if you’re white” (McCarthy 114) because he is ready, if not eager, to murder and scalp any inhabitants that are of color.

McCarthy portrays this disturbing racist ethnocentricity most effectively through Glanton’s encounters with the Mexican authorities who actually fund his scalping missions, where he demonstrates no hesitancy in ridiculing or debasing the hands that feed him. In a recreation of an actual historical event that occurred in the town of Jesús Maria, Glanton radically insults the Mexican inhabitants by dragging their flag throughout the city square: “. . . he cut down the Mexican flag with his knife and tied it to the tail of a mule. Then he mounted the mule and goaded it through the square dragging the sacred bandera in the mud behind him” (McCarthy 193). But the most disturbing display of ethnocentric self-righteousness--and the most radical distortions of the manifest destiny of the “young American” held by Glanton and his followers

(apart from the wanton murder and scalping throughout the book) occurs at the ball of Angel Trias, Governor of Chihuahua City. Despite Trias's political status, his education and eloquent manners (all historically accurate), Glanton sees yet another inferior man of color and demonstrates this inherent racist attitude throughout the night as Trias attempts to host Glanton's motley crew of hired mercenaries. As "[P]atriotic toasts were drunk, the governor's aides raising their glasses to Washington and Franklin," Glanton's riders respond "with yet more of their own country's heroes, ignorant alike of diplomacy and any name at all from the pantheon of their sister republic" (McCarthy 169). This blatant display of disrespect and ethnocentric sense of superiority from the "bloated and belching mercenaries" (McCarthy 170) gradually degenerates into a scene of utter chaos, debauchery and violence, and though Chihuahua's citizens appeal to Trias, he remains much like "the sorcerer's apprentice who could indeed provoke the imp to do his will but could in no way make him cease again" (McCarthy 171). For the Chihuahuan, close contact with these hired predators induces the realization that, in the eyes of such "employees," Mexicans remain as fair a game as any other race of colored people, including the American Indian; indeed, for the Chihuahuan, "Mejor los indios [Better the Indians]" (McCarthy 171) than the ethnocentric scalp hunters hired to murder them.

In the chaotic atmosphere of mid nineteenth century northern Mexico, the activities of "los indios" often attracted more attention from the American and Mexican governments than those of scalp hunters, rustlers, disease-carrying gold seekers, marauders or nomadic bandits traveling (and prospering) throughout the region. In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy accurately depicts the utterly confusing chaos that permeated the area during this period and repeatedly emphasizes the futility of justifying the activities of one lawless faction over another. By emphasizing the significance of chance, for example, within the activities of the Glanton Gang, he successfully recreates an atmosphere in which all northern Mexican inhabitants--whether they are

predators or bystanders--must constantly view encounters with strangers as potentially lethal:

On the fifth of December they rode out north in the cold darkness before daybreak carrying with them a contract signed by the governor of the state of Sonora for the furnishing of Apache scalps. . . . Carroll and Sanford had defected from the company and with them now rode a boy named Sloat who had been left sick to die in this place by one of the gold trains bound for the coast . . . They rode north onto the broad Sonoran desert and in that cauterized waste they wandered aimlessly for weeks pursuing rumor and shadow. A few small bands of Chiricahua raiders supposedly seen by herdsmen on some squalid and desolate ranch. A few peons waylaid and slain. Two weeks out they massacred a pueblo on the Nacozari River and two days later as they rode towards Ures with the scalps they encountered a party of armed Sonoran cavalry . . . A running fight ensued in which three of Glanton's party were killed and another seven wounded (204-205).

Despite the fact that he alone must cope with the burden of having a legalized price placed upon his scalp, the American Indian does not stand apart from any other particular faction within the quasi-fictional world of *Blood Meridian*: McCarthy wisely refuses to stereotype him as a noble savage but rather portrays him as both a periodic victim of slaughter and an equal player within this violent arena, as a player with diverse motivations that remain, for the most part, unspoken.

What is the connection, then, between manifest destiny and the American Indian who simultaneously battles the filibuster and the opportunist hired scalp hunter in *Blood Meridian*? In short, McCarthy's marauding scalp hunters represent an extremely disconcerting perspective, a radical interpretation of manifest destiny, one that accentuates racist policies (nourished by the War of 1846-48 and subsequent filibuster movements) under a façade of American moral responsibility. They represent a radical ethnocentricity applied to, and justified by, manifest

destiny that results in blatant genocide and utter human evil. The American Indian is the primary victim of this particular interpretation of manifest destiny, and though Glanton's behaviour lacks any explicit strategy or ulterior political motive (unlike White, he does not often engage in racist rhetoric and propaganda), he and his crew genuinely reflect a racism towards Mexicans and Indians--towards any people of color, towards the "mean red nigger" (McCarthy 275)--that might be viewed as a radically diseased distortion of the values voiced by Emerson and O'Sullivan. Glanton may not be the "young American" that Emerson envisioned, but nevertheless, he is representative of many Americans who contribute to the breakdown of security (and thus, tradition, culture, prosperity, etc.) of America's "primitive" neighboring states and the colored peoples that inhabit them.

As authentic representatives, therefore, of the opportunist who exploits the notion of manifest destiny and land expansion policies during this period, Glanton's riders have no delineated political, philosophical or moral boundaries with which to limit the extent of their behaviour. In every way, they remain free to exploit Emerson's and O'Sullivan's initial concept and the radical ethnocentricity that stems from the misinterpretation, the manipulation or any highly subjective distortion of this concept. And, quite disturbingly, McCarthy demonstrates that once the nation (as a whole) accepts that the white Christian American has a moral responsibility to "illuminate" the more "primitive" colored races of North America, opportunists such as Glanton and White will inevitably exploit this belief in the name of personal monetary gain.

The American Indian: Representation of Human Evil

In McCarthy's landscape, the American Indian is viewed by many as a primitive Other, a "red nigger" (275). Historically, with a radically smaller and less unified population, Comanche and Apache bands within the Texas-Mexico border region were recognized as primitive, lawless

and immoral and their raiding culture was quickly pigeonholed by many Americans as the predominant cause of the radical violence in the Southwest. These bands became, in many ways, the primary scapegoats for the violent exploitation of opportunists such as the Glanton Gang who, following in the footsteps of the filibuster movements, exploited the politically weakened northern Mexican states in a bid for personal power, wealth, and prestige. Although hostilities carried on between Americans, Mexicans and Indians following the War of 1846-48, the reinstigation of legalized scalp hunting in Chihuahua and Sonora demonstrated a distinctly racist and ethnocentric attitude of superiority on the part of both Mexico and the United States.

But what separates Mexico from America on the issue of the scalp trade and how does state-sanctioned scalp hunting tie directly and uniquely into the *American* concept of manifest destiny? Clearly, it is impossible to view racism strictly as a byproduct of America's manifest destiny; indeed, one must note that although Texans (like northern Mexicans) suffered from similar atrocities at the hands of Comanche or Apache raiding parties, the United States (unlike Sonora or Chihuahua) never *officially* sanctioned the practice of scalp hunting--any scalp hunting that took place in northern Mexico by Americans was the result of privately sponsored military groups hoping to acquire a fortune at the expense of "primitive" races. It is difficult, however, to condemn only the Chihuahuan and Sonoran governments for their brutal sanctions, as there are clearly factors attributable to America that encouraged Indian raiding activities in northern Mexico during this period. By failing to effectively enforce Article XI of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (thus allowing Apache and Comanche raiding parties to continue activity in northern Mexico), the United States implicitly supported violence in the northern border regions of its neighbor. Furthermore, arms trading with these bands north of the border often encouraged the raiding activities. In 1849, the American Army began construction of a permanent line of defense against Indian raiding activity through the approximate center of Texas, essentially

destroying many of the traditional hunting grounds of these bands and pushing them further south into less effectively controlled northern Mexican states. As Richardson notes, "A close correlation existed between the number of troops and the extent of marauding operations by the Indians," and with three new lines of forts constructed throughout Texas in the mid century (Fort Worth to Fort Duncan, Fort Belknap to Fort Clark, and a third chain of posts along the Rio Grande designed to simultaneously keep out Mexican marauding parties and retain Indian marauding parties bound for Mexico), many tribes felt the pressure to emigrate southwards (*Texas* 202).

McCarthy's narrator, however, remains distinctly mute regarding the violent behaviour of the American Indian. He offers no apologies or justification for his consistent ferocity but rather, attributes his evil behaviour, as with that of Glanton and White, to something other than historical circumstance (i.e., vengeful reactionary behaviour against cultural uprooting or genocide). In short, the American Indian of *Blood Meridian*, like his counterparts, demonstrates an inherent capacity for the art of making war. By portraying him as an equal counterpart to Glanton or Holden within this violent arena, by refusing to justify his behaviour solely as responsive to a fragile and diminishing way of life in an evolving North America, McCarthy once again demonstrates that evil and Man's affinity for the art of war are as inherent to the American Indian as they are to the scalp hunter, the filibuster, or to simply the wanderer. In McCarthy's quasi-fictional world, evil is not solely attributable to socioeconomic, political or cultural influences, nor can it be defined solely as a byproduct of dualistic religious constructs. When the carnivalesque Comanche raiding party unleashes its fury upon White's filibusters, for instance, it does so as a habit of conditioning that resembles the often violent automaton-like behaviour of Glanton's gang: as with so many of Glanton's victims, White's expedition has simply crossed the wrong path at the wrong time. McCarthy's Comanche barely stop to ascertain the degree of

danger or profit in their imminent encounter with White; instead, they ride on in parodic military formation, never breaking stride or stopping so much as to even acknowledge the presence of the filibusters that they are about to massacre and sodomize. These raiders react *instinctively* by rapidly slaughtering White's crew and dispassionately riding on, oblivious to the carnage that they have produced, thus reproducing the behaviour of the Glanton Gang much more accurately than White's filibustering expedition.

This violent behaviour validates the philosophy of McCarthy's ex-slavetrader hermit that the kid encounters early in his travels, who effectively sets the thematic stage for the kid's journey by claiming that evil is ever present on the stage of human conduct. McCarthy's hermit states:

... It's a mystery. A man's at odds to know his mind cause his mind is aught he has to know it with. He can know his heart, but he don't want to. Rightly so. Best not to look in there. It aint the heart of a creature that is bound in the way that God has set for it. You can find meanness in the least of creatures, but when God made man the devil was at his elbow. A creature that can do anything. Make a machine. And a machine to make the machine. And evil that can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it. (McCarthy 19)

Like Judge Holden, McCarthy's hermit is a teacher who readily accepts the darker side of human nature and views the human capacity for the art of war as potentially limitless, an "evil that can run itself a thousand years." Unlike Holden, however, the hermit views evil as dangerous behaviour that is ultimately, morally *wrong*.

CHAPTER 2: JUDGE HOLDEN'S WAR DANCE

A Brief Profile of the Judge

Near to the stunning climax of *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy offers a brief, yet accurate, summary of the judge:

... he was among every kind of man . . . herder and bullwacker and drover and freighter and miner and hunter and soldier and pedlar and gambler and drifter and drunkard and thief and he was among the dregs of the earth in beggary a thousand years and he was among the scapegrace scions of eastern dynasties and in all that motley assemblage he sat by them and yet alone as if he were some other sort of man entire . . . (325)

As a philosopher, a warrior, a pedophile, and an extraordinarily savage butcher, McCarthy's Judge Holden is a complex and disconcerting character. Despite his eloquent rhetoric, he remains a fiercely cruel predator capable of unimaginable evil--even McCarthy declines to describe in detail the terrible fate of the kid. Holden distinguishes himself from his companions, however, by refusing to ground his reality on the basis of the pervading ideological values of his day: as a philosopher primarily concerned with the nature of war, he reacts to war rather than to the ideology of manifest destiny. Consequently, unlike Glanton or White, he is difficult to analyze through the frame of any radically ethnocentric interpretation of Emerson's or O'Sullivan's ideals. Manifest destiny, however, shapes the behaviour of his companions and in many ways validates his philosophy of war which, in turn, utterly disregards the nature of the scalp hunters' fierce behaviour. For Holden, the violence of war is a byproduct of his obsessive pursuit of control over his own destiny, for he believes that the "larger will" (McCarthy 249) of predestiny controls most men. He seeks to strengthen his ability to shape his own future, free from the constraints of this external influence. Scalping, molesting and murdering, therefore, are highly significant endeavors--not because of their brazen immorality, but because they are steps taken

towards achieving this goal.

The ideology behind manifest destiny resonates strongly with Holden's obsession over destiny and predestiny, particularly the notion that America has a moral and religious responsibility to conquer and "illuminate" more "primitive" peoples, despite the (consequent) exploitation and brutality engendered by this "illumination." However, as Dana Phillips notes, Holden's rhetoric is also consistently manipulative: his lectures are "first and foremost literary performances, the sum of his speeches does not equal a whole person. They are delivered as highly ironic and playful" (441). Thus, the purpose of this section is to explain Holden's disturbing philosophy of war in the hopes of clarifying its relationship with America's apparent manifest destiny. I will investigate his rhetoric carefully in order to distinguish between riddle and philosophical doctrine, between the truthfulness and the playfulness of his words.

Battling Against Predestiny

There is a key passage in *Blood Meridian* in which the judge, attempting to outline exactly what drives he and his companions to their extreme behaviour, explains his philosophy of war.

He states:

Men are born for games. Nothing else. . . . trial of chance or trial of worth all games aspire to the condition of war for here that which is wagered swallows up game, player, all. . . . This enhancement of the game to its ultimate state admits no argument concerning the notion of fate. *The selection of one man over another is a preference absolute* and irrevocable and it is a dull man indeed who could reckon so profound a decision without agency or significance . . . This is the nature of war, whose stake is at once the game and the authority and their justification. Seen so, war is the truest form of divination. *It is the testing of one's will and the will of another within that larger will which because it binds them is therefore forced to select.* War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing

of the unity of existence. War is god. (McCarthy 249, emphasis added)

In this passage, Holden clearly illustrates his belief in a “larger will” that binds men together and determines their respective fates, for this is his perspective of predestiny. His primary concern is to defeat the “larger will” of predestiny in order to determine his own fate. This can only be achieved, he believes, through the act of making war. Consequently, the key to understanding the judge is understanding the enormous historical significance that war holds within his world view.

Holden believes that the majority of individuals unwittingly believe in a *self-created* destiny within the context of their own unique reality, thus when he states that “[T]he mystery is that there is no mystery” (McCarthy 252), he refers to *self-constructed* mysteries. For the judge, these are not true but rather, illusion. Instead, he believes that there is a “larger will” which controls the destiny of every man yet remains beyond the comprehension of any single individual. His ambitious goal, then, is to perceive a reality beyond his individual perception, to perceive the reality of the “larger will” of predestiny so that he may effectively compete with this “larger will” in order to claim control over his own fate. He lives with the fear, however, that he may never gain such insight, and it is Man’s ignorance towards his predestiny that drives Holden forward in a quest for insight and a “unity of existence” with powers larger and more influential than his own. In his final conversation with the kid, he illustrates these fears by observing a pathetic and unwitting barfly who sits alone in a Fort Griffin saloon, speaking only to himself:

See him. That man hatless. You know his opinion of the world. You can read it in his face, in his stance. Yet his complaint that a man’s life is no bargain masks the actual case with him. Which is that men will not do as he wishes them to. Have never done, never will do. That’s the way of things with him and his life is so balked about by difficulty and become so altered of its intended architecture that he is little more than a walking hovel hardly fit

to house the human spirit at all. *Can he say, such a man, that there is no malign thing set against him? That there is no power and no force and no cause? What manner of heretic could doubt agency and claimant alike? Can he believe that the wreckage of his existence is unentailed? No liens, no creditors?* That gods of vengeance and of compassion alike lie sleeping in their crypt and whether our cries are for an accounting or for the destruction of the ledgers altogether they must evoke only the same silence and that it is this silence which will prevail? To whom is he talking, man? (McCarthy 330, emphasis added)

Holden refuses to share this unfortunate man's fate, refuses to allow any "malign thing" to dictate the terms of *his* destiny because he believes that the "gods of vengeance and of compassion" are not lying asleep within their crypt but are rather *wide awake and directing the course of his destiny*. This is, however, an unacceptable state of affairs and he must retaliate through the act of war, the only phenomenon in which he finds a "unity of existence" with the "larger will" of predestiny and consequently, the opportunity to shatter its influence.

For Holden, war leads to illumination, knowledge and power that is not readily accessible to any given *individual* because it binds Man's will to that of his predestiny. By observing "horror in the round" and ultimately understanding that war speaks to Man's "inmost heart" (McCarthy 331), one gains invaluable insight through unification with the "larger will" of predestiny, unification that only war can produce; for Holden, the bonding process of war, therefore, is essential, for this unification makes war the "truest form of divination" (McCarthy 249). As he so blatantly states, "War is god" (McCarthy 249). And as a devotee of this god, he strives to become the suzerain of his world, for only then will he be able to "dictate the terms of his own fate" and "find[ing] order from the tapestry" of his life (McCarthy 199).¹⁵

In order to achieve this goal, he contends, one must see beyond any individual perception of reality that is confined by the unique context and environment of the individual: every man is

unique and perceives a unique reality with mysteries unique to this reality alone. Holden states:

A man seeks his own destiny and no other . . . Will or nill. Any man who could discover his own fate and elect therefore some opposite course could only come at last to that selfsame reckoning at the same appointed time, for each man's destiny is as large as the world he inhabits. . . . (McCarthy 330)

The typical individual cannot “elect . . . some opposite course” because his destiny is predetermined by a “larger will” that he is largely unaware of and thus unable to subvert or destroy. For Holden, however, this is far too limiting:

The truth about the world, he said, is that anything is possible. . . .

The universe is no narrow thing and the order within it is not constrained by any latitude in its conception to repeat what exists in one part in any other part. Even in this world more things exist without our knowledge than with it and *the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there*, like a string in a maze, so that you shall not lose your way. For *existence has its own order and that no man's mind can compass, that mind itself being but a fact among others*. (McCarthy 245, emphasis added)

For most men, “existence has its own order” that frames their individual reality yet remains *beyond their comprehension* and thus, “no man's mind can compass” its ultimate motivation. Holden believes, however, that those men, those warriors, who participate within the act of war are privilege to a deeper understanding of the “larger will” because they have been bound to it through the violence of their profession.

Holden's War Dance

In his final attempt to explain to the kid the significance of the “unity of existence” with the “larger will” of predestiny that war engenders, Holden allegorically refers to life as a “dance,”

cautioning his companion on its incomprehensible nature:

This is an orchestration for an event. For a dance in fact. . . . As the dance is the thing with which we are concerned and contains complete within itself its own arrangement and history and finale there is no necessity that the dancers contain these things within themselves as well. (McCarthy 328-329)

As a “dancer,” the typical individual glimpses only his *apparent* destiny, unaware of how the “larger will” of predestiny controls the events of his life. This spawns a debilitating ignorance, causing many to remain puppets of a force that they fail to comprehend, for they cannot establish a communal perspective of themselves or their lives. Consequently, they continue to thrive on illusion. Holden states: “In any event the history of all is not the history of each nor indeed the sum of those histories and none here can finally comprehend the reason for his presence for he has no way of knowing even in what the event consists” (McCarthy 329). For the judge, therefore, “there is no necessity that the dancers” maintain an awareness of the dance’s “arrangement and history and finale” *unless* they wish to control their own destinies, unless they confront war as an ongoing presence, indeed, as the only constant in the history of humanity (McCarthy 328).

To truly understand the “arrangement and history and finale” (McCarthy 329) of the “dance” through the bonding process of war, however, is Holden’s own highest ambition. In this dance of life, only the warrior gains enough insight to control his own fate, to face “horror in the round” and to admit that he is both sustained by, and capable of, producing such horror. For the judge, war is not a matter of strategy, bravery or indeed, *any* redeeming element that often accompanies the “horror in the round” that warriors often face; rather, it is a blunt matter of butchery and opportunism that consistently leads to the slaughter of innocents. There is a unique honesty, Holden claims, engendered by violence and confrontation with violence which

ensures that there is only room for one type of dancer in this dance--the warrior--for all others fail to bond with the "larger will" that controls them, fail to acknowledge that Man defines himself through war, that Man makes war his god, that only "[W]ar endures" (McCarthy 248).

He states:

Only that man who has offered himself up entirely to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learned at last that it speaks to his inmost heart, only that man can dance. . . . There is room on the stage for one beast and one beast alone. All others are destined for a night that is eternal and without name.

(McCarthy 331)

The judge is this "one beast alone," the warrior who is a true adherent to the god War, the warrior who strives to control his own destiny.

Yet he recognizes that the influence of the warrior is constantly diminishing in an increasingly "civilized" world, and that as this influence fades, the world loses both its honesty and its insight into the "larger will" of predestiny, for the decline of the warrior initiates its invulnerable advance. Holden confides in the kid:

I tell you this. As war becomes dishonored and its nobility called into question those honorable men who recognize the sanctity of blood will become excluded from the dance, which is the warrior's right, and thereby will the dance become a false dance and the dancers false dancers. (McCarthy 331)

Ironically, the nobility of Holden's own war making must indeed be "called into question," for his violent habits lack any ethical standards by which bravery, compassion or prowess may be demonstrated. Despite this lack, however, the judge maintains his claim that (his brand of) war is a ritual which honors the "sanctity of blood" and eliminates despair or loneliness by forcing warriors to bond through the life and death challenges that they place upon one another. For

Holden, it bonds the wills of warriors through the horrors that they experience (and accept as intrinsic to their human nature) and through their shared presence within the arena of the “larger will” of predestiny. Because they *force* predestiny to choose their fate, warriors alone break its chain. This ritual, in which the “selection of one man over another is a preference absolute and irrevocable” (McCarthy 249) is real because it includes the “letting of blood,” for “[R]ituals which fail in this requirement are but mock rituals” (McCarthy 329). Holden is the complete antithesis of the “dull man who could reckon so profound a decision without agency” (McCarthy 249) and thus he remains driven towards a “unity of existence” with his predestiny, for only this unity will allow him to grasp a reality beyond his limited individual perception (if only fleetingly) and claim proprietorship of his own future. All non-warriors (and even warriors such as Glanton, who allows that “men’s destinies are given” [McCarthy 243]), however, must “come at last to that selfsame reckoning at the same appointed time”--to their predestiny--because they fail to recognize that their destiny is predetermined. This ignorance, Holden claims, ensures a lack of desire to control one’s own fate. Unlike the warrior, the non-warrior is utterly removed from understanding an order of existence “that no [individual] man’s mind can compass,” one that grants him the power to evade what has been projected for him without his consent.

By consistently striving to rise above his status as a predetermined individual, Holden demonstrates a truly ambitious quality, yet he is driven by fear rather than initiative: his intentions stem from a dread of isolation that keeps Man in a state of darkness and ignorance. There is a captivating scene in which he attempts to indoctrinate the kid into his philosophy of war by explaining how his dread of ignorance and isolation influences his savage behaviour. Holden indicates that this dread exists within all men:

. . . every man knows the false at once. Never doubt it. That feeling in the breast that evokes a child’s memory of loneliness such as when the others have gone and

only the game is left with its solitary participant. A solitary game, without opponent. Where only the rules are at hazard. Dont look away. We are not speaking in mysteries. You of all men are no stranger to that feeling, the emptiness and the despair. It is that which we take arms against, is it not? Is not blood the tempering agent in the mortar which bonds? (McCarthy 329)

Indeed, blood becomes the “tempering agent” between Holden and the Glanton Gang as they ride through a world where “death seem[s] to be the most prevalent feature of [the] landscape” (McCarthy 248), a desert world “upon which so many have been broken,” one that is “vast and calls for largeness of heart but . . . is . . . ultimately empty” (McCarthy 330). In order to avoid a state of isolated ignorance within this desert Holden accepts war as his god because his acceptance of its intrinsic presence within the human spirit eliminates confusion, chaos, and the dreaded isolation of the non-warrior.

Holden is motivated, therefore, by a desire to bond with others in order to avoid a random and chaotic individual reality. By allowing the warrior to temporarily exist within a common arena of higher perception in which one might alter one’s predestiny, war becomes a remedy for the isolation that threatens to consume the individual, but never the warrior who has become immune through a “unity of existence” with other warriors.

The Pursuit of Enlightenment Supersedes Morality

As *the* single phenomenon in which he can see beyond his limited individual perception, war takes precedence over all else in Holden’s world and the ethics of war no longer concern morality so much as the pursuit of enlightenment. Consequently, the wholesale slaughter of innocents is of little consequence for him, as the act of making war becomes a spiritual and intellectual pursuit that supersedes any particular set of moral values created by any particular society during any particular period. War becomes the pursuit of personal control and,

empowered by this control, Holden--as a savage mercenary, as a butcher, a scalp-hunter, and a warrior--easily reverses the moral condemnations of his society. In a typically enigmatic exchange with black Jackson, he explains this empowerment to his companions:

The good book says that he that lives by the sword shall perish by the sword,
said the black.

The judge smiled, his face shining with grease. What right man would have it any
other way? he said. (McCarthy 248)

For this disciple of war, dying "by the sword" is an honorable and worthy death because it results from his pursuit of knowledge gained through "the truest form of divination" (McCarthy 249), for dying "by the sword" can only occur when the warrior has established contact with and, indeed, is permeated by his god, war.

In the same allegorical manner in which he refers to life as a "dance," Holden refers to war as "the ultimate game," and because "[M]en are born for games" and "play is nobler than work," all other matters are of less consequence in this world (McCarthy 249). He states that every child

. . . knows too that the worth or merit of a game is not inherent in the game itself but rather in the value of that which is put at hazard. Games of chance require a wager to have meaning at all. Games of sport involve the skill and strength of the opponents and the humiliation of defeat and the pride of victory are in themselves sufficient stake because they inhere in the worth of the principals and define them. But trial of chance or trial of worth all games aspire to the condition of war for here that which is wagered swallows up game, player, all. . . . War is the ultimate game . . . (McCarthy 249)

War becomes the ultimate game because "the value of that which is put at hazard" during its act--human life--is irreplaceable. Consequently, this game increases to its utmost level, as does the

insight provided by the lessons learned through the game. Furthermore, because war “swallows up game, player, all,” it supersedes any particular morality; indeed, for Holden, there is no distinct set of moral values that has endured throughout history that has proven to be a stronger influence upon humanity than war, despite--or perhaps because of--its violent brutality. Aware of this, he promotes a distinctly Nietzschean perspective by emphasizing a lack of validity within any particular set of moral/religious values:

Might does not make right, said Irving. The man that wins in some combat is not vindicated morally.

Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak. Historical law subverts it at every turn. A moral view can never be proven right or wrong by any ultimate test. . . . Man’s vanity may well approach the infinite in capacity but his knowledge remains imperfect and however much he comes to value his judgments ultimately he must submit them before a higher court. Here there can be no special pleading. Here are considerations of equity and rectitude and moral right rendered void and without warrant and here are the views of the litigants despised. Decisions of life and death, of what shall be and what shall not, beggar all questions of right. In elections of these magnitudes are all lesser ones subsumed, moral, spiritual, natural.

The judge searched out the circle for disputants. But what says the priest? he said.

Tobin looked up. The priest does not say.

The priest does not say, said the judge. Nihil dicit. But the priest has said. For the priest has put by the robes of his craft and taken up the tools of that higher calling which all men honor. The priest also would be no godserver but a god himself.

Tobin shook his head. You’ve a blasphemous tongue, Holden.

Men of god and men of war have strange affinities.

I'll not secondsay you in your notions, said Tobin. Dont ask it.

Ah Priest, said the judge. What could I ask of you that you've not already given?

(McCarthy 250-251)

Near the end of this exchange, the judge slyly directs the conversation towards Tobin, for this expriest, simply through his presence within the scalp-hunting expedition, represents the failings of the Judeo-Christian belief system to establish a set of moral values that can convincingly compete with war as an enduring presence within the history of human conduct. Unlike Tobin, Holden is utterly unhindered by any sense of Judeo-Christian morality and simply bypasses the Christian's struggle to unite violence with faith, his/her inability to find "unanimity in the belief that the man of war may also be a man of religion" (Keegan 193).

Accordingly, war precedes moral precepts of Judeo-Christian faith primarily because of its constancy; in fact, McCarthy's epigram from *The Tuma Daily Sun* (June 13, 1982) indicates that war has been a dominating presence in human history for over three hundred thousand years.¹⁶ "[W]ar is god" (McCarthy 249), the judge contends, because it is intrinsic to humanity to cause war, to define itself through war, to shape itself and its history through war. And by petitioning directly to the "chambers of the historical absolute" (McCarthy 250), Holden aligns this philosophy with historical facts that will ultimately remain long after *any* particular morality (of an ideological, political or religious persuasion) has dissipated. War endures, he claims, because only war offers one the opportunity to take control of one's own fate and thus, it must take precedence over moral law, for if human destiny *is* predetermined, then ultimately, war benefits humanity more than any moral law because it allows Man to break the chain of this predestiny. Consequently, in Holden's violent endeavors to seek a "unity of existence" with the "larger will" of predestiny, the ends justify the means because, under the scrutiny of a "higher

court . . . considerations of equity and rectitude and moral right [are] rendered void and without warrant” (McCarthy 251). This is, of course, a highly specific and individualistic ideology unique to Holden. As Vereen Bell notes, “The judge is a worshiper of truth. Truth is what can be known, not what can be supposed or dreamed up. He therefore absolutizes history because history is the repository of all that can be known. History is all that can prove anything” (120). Unfortunately, this line of reasoning justifies Holden’s butchery, indeed genocide, of colored races, and allows him to set aside the moral rights of his (most often innocent) victims. However, with this line of reasoning, he also lays the foundation for an extremely convincing theoretical argument because his philosophy cannot be proven faulty (despite its troubling nature) and because his “peers” within the Glanton Gang consistently demonstrate the veracity of war’s fundamental marriage to, and influence upon, human nature.

A *satan* more than a Satan

If “[W]ar is god,” one might assume that humanity defines itself through war, for defining oneself through one’s faith is a common practice within many cultures. Accordingly, war is *the* defining factor of human nature, and if war is the “truest form of divination” (McCarthy 249), then Holden incarnates such divination. Given this perspective, the judge no longer appears quite so Satanic, for Satan is the ultimate *opponent* of God. Although Reverend Green believes that “[Holden] is him. . . . This is him. The devil. Here he stands” (McCarthy 7), the judge poses a much more complex and potentially perilous obstacle to Green’s faith, for unlike the Devil, he refuses to appropriate the role of God’s opponent. In Holden’s view, any particular set of moral values (including that of the Judeo-Christian belief system) must obey the ethics of history with war as its only constant, as its God; thus, he represents a *satan* of the Pentateuch much more accurately than the Satan of the Christian faith.

With war as God, and consequently, the evil of war as intrinsic to humanity, the judge’s

philosophy resonates strongly with early Hebraic and Judeo-Christian concepts of evil, those which precede the notion of Satan as the absolute opponent of God, those that are not nearly as dualistic as later Christian beliefs. According to early Hebraic thought (revolutionary in its monotheistic concept), the entire polytheistic pantheon of deities was eventually transformed into a single omnipotent entity known as Yahweh, who distributed good and evil as he saw fit (Pellegrino 101-102). With the Persian invasion of 538 BCE and the subsequent Babylonian exile, however, the early Hebrews assimilated various Zoroastrian ideals into their own belief system, resulting in a mild form of dualism that engendered an entirely separate entity representative of evil who, in the Pentateuch, was known as the *ha-satan*. Over time, this term was shortened to simply, the *satan*.

Initially, the *satan* is an angel that is specifically assigned, *by God*, to play the role of heavenly “adversary.”¹⁷ During this early period, the *satan* has yet to take on a specific identity and remains a full member of the Heavenly court. Eventually, however, as his role grows in importance and Zoroastrian influence engenders a distinctly dualistic influence over the Hebrew faith, the *satan* takes on a specific identity--that of “Satan.” This entity eventually acquires the name Lucifer when the early Christian theologians Tertullian and St. Augustine identify him with a falling star taken from a passage in Isaiah.¹⁸ As expressed so brilliantly by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, these learned scholars make this association because the Devil was formerly thought to have been a powerful archangel cast out of Heaven for leading a failed rebellion against God, a fascinating legend formulated by Jewish and Christian writers which describes Satan as a chief in the heavenly hierarchy of angels, initially preeminent among all created beings in beauty, power and wisdom.

Understandably, this legend resonates powerfully within *Blood Meridian*, where Holden is indeed preeminent among his fellow riders--perhaps not in beauty, but clearly in power and

wisdom.¹⁹ It should be noted, however, that McCarthy refuses to absolutize the distinction between the *satan* and Satan by periodically aligning Holden with Satanic ideals: in his first appearance, the judge challenges the gospel of Reverend Green, clearly positioning himself as an enemy of the Church (McCarthy 6-8); Tobin the expriest is constantly wary of the judge because he believes that, in some Faust-like manner, Holden has a “secret commerce” or “terrible covenant” with Glanton (McCarthy 126); and Holden’s attempts to indoctrinate the kid into his philosophy of war often resemble Satan’s temptation of Christ in the desert, shortly before the crucifixion (McCarthy 299-300, 306, 327-331). As an initiate of war, of *his* God, however, Holden adopts a much more *satanic* than Satanic stance; indeed, he consistently presents himself as a representative of this god, as its champion, its apprentice, its disciple and its servant bound by the pursuit of enlightenment through a “unity of existence” with the “larger will” of predestiny within the holocaustic landscape of McCarthy’s world. He believes that his violent butchery is of little consequence, for the opinions of his victims mean nothing (as they are non-warriors and thus, inconsequential) as does the condemnation of Judeo-Christian morality (a belief system, he believes, that is of little consequence, for, ultimately, it has not proven itself to be a serious contender with war making as a human historical constant).²⁰

A Suzerain Who Steals History

Bearing an uncanny resemblance to the ancient Hebraic *satan*, Holden practices the art of war in order to achieve the illumination and the “unity of existence” that war, as God, offers. He believes, however, that only as the suzerain of his world will he achieve this goal, and thus, he seeks out knowledge through the remnants of the history that he encounters, for knowledge is power. But along the road to suzerainty, he records and subsequently *destroys* all historical evidence of the past, a practice that is initially puzzling until one considers its importance within the context of his philosophy of war.

By *stealing history*--by recording it in his ledger and subsequently destroying it--Holden becomes its final witness; and as its final witness, he is its final possessor, able to reshape, exploit or manipulate it towards his own philosophical ends. More importantly, however, he possesses history in order to reverse the "mystery and fear" (199 McCarthy) that influences the nature, the perspective and the outcome of his companions' individual realities. Holden explains, in characteristically enigmatic terms, his motivation to Toadvine:

Toadvine sat watching [Holden] as he made his notations in his ledger . . . and he asked him what was his purpose in all this.

The judge's quill ceased its scratching. He looked at Toadvine. Then he continued to write again.

Toadvine spat into the fire.

The judge wrote on and then he folded his ledger shut . . .

Whatever exists, he said. Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent. . . . These anonymous creatures, he said, may seem little or nothing in the world. Yet the smallest crumb can devour us. . . . Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth. . . .

Toadvine sat with his boots crossed before the fire. No man can acquaint himself with everything on this earth, he said.

The judge tilted his great head. The man who believes that the secrets of the world are forever hidden lives in mystery and fear. Superstitions will drag him down. The rain will erode the deeds of his life. But that man who sets himself the task of singling out the thread of order from the tapestry will by the decision alone have taken charge of the world and it is only by such taking charge that he will effect a way to

dictate the terms of his own fate. (McCarthy 198-99)

In order to “dictate the terms of his own fate,” to find “a thread of order from the tapestry” of his life, Holden must establish suzerainty over his world, he must conquer “mystery and fear” (McCarthy 199) and “[S]uperstitions [that] will drag him down” (McCarthy 199). On another occasion, he records the specifics of a small armored foot guard originating from “an older culture deep in the stone mountains” (McCarthy 139) that the Glanton Gang has stumbled across:

. . . the judge sketched in profile, and in perspective, citing the dimensions in his neat script, making marginal notes. . . . When he had done he took up the little foot guard and turned it in his hand and studied it again and then he crushed it into a ball of foil and pithed it into the fire. He gathered up the other artifacts and cast them also into the fire. . . . Then he sat with his hands cupped in his lap and he seemed much satisfied with the world, as if his council had been sought at its creation.

A Tennessean named Webster had been watching him and he asked the judge what he aimed to do with all those notes and sketches and the judge smiled and said that it was his intention to expunge them from the memory of man. (McCarthy 140)

Holden must ingest, expunge and control as much information as possible in order to understand even the “anonymous creatures” of his world--much less the “larger will” of predestiny--for only then will he be “properly suzerain of the earth” (McCarthy 198). Only then will he have the ability to take control of his destiny. In his final confrontation with the kid, he explains the significance of stealing history and hoarding its knowledge, of possessing the past:

The straight and the winding way are one and now that you are here what do the years count since last we two met together? *Men's memories are uncertain and the past that was differs little from the past that was not.*

He took up the tumbler the judge had poured and he drank and he set it down

again. He looked at the judge. I been everywhere, he said. This is just one more place.

The judge arched his brow. Did you post witness? he said. To report to you on this counting existence of those places once you'd quit them?

That's crazy.

Is it? *Where is yesterday?* Where is Glanton and Brown and where is the priest?

He leaned closer. Where is Shelby, whom you left to the mercies of Elias in the desert, and where is Tate whom you abandoned in the mountains? Where are the ladies, ah the fair and tender ladies with whom you danced at the governor's ball when you were a hero anointed with the blood of the enemies of the republic you'd elected to defend? And where is the fiddler and where is the dance? (McCarthy 330-331, emphasis added)

By educating himself and subsequently destroying all of the historical evidence of the past that he encounters, the judge alone "post[s] witness"; he becomes history's sole possessor and thus its controller, conquering the "mystery and fear" that continue to enchant and influence the remainder of the Glanton Gang, whose "[heart's] desire [is] to be told some mystery" (McCarthy 252). When Holden asks the kid, therefore, "[W]here is yesterday?," he alone knows the answer: "yesterday" is in his ledger, at his command, and by recording and understanding it, he has risen above the ignorance and fear that plagues his companions. The judge alone retains this knowledge and this enlightenment and thus power over those who dispute his philosophy of war and are susceptible to fear and superstition. He has taken the first steps down the road to suzerainty over his world.

CHAPTER THREE: THE GLANTON GANG AS HERMETICS

The Fundamental Difference Between Holden and the Glanton Gang

Holden believes that his ability to conquer “mystery and fear” (McCarthy 199) distinguishes him from his companions and marks the fundamental difference behind the motivations of their shared violent behaviour. As professional mercenaries, the Glanton Gang makes war, quite simply, for a living. They react to their profession and their environment almost as automaton killers, often without the slightest thought of the implications of their behaviour except with regards to monetary profit. Consequently, Holden observes a type of hermeneutic circle (that does not lead to enlightenment) produced by Glanton’s riders, who react violently to the violence of their environment, which is often determined by their own behaviour. The gang’s apparent lack of purpose/destination echoes its ignorance towards the significance of the “unity of existence” that it creates between Man and his destiny through the wholesale slaughter of innocents. Despite this ignorance, however, Holden continuously attempts to outline the importance of war to his scalp-hunting companions in an effort to reveal their significance as warriors in human history. For him, however, the gang’s ignorance is of little import as he believes that at some deeply-rooted unconscious level, he and his companions have acquired an extremely visceral, penetrating perception of reality in which morality and civility no longer carry any bearing or status, and that Glanton’s riders unwittingly (yet consistently) validate his philosophy of war.

Periodically, there are rhetorical debates between Holden and his companions that emphasize the fundamental difference between their respective motivations. These are arguments which serve to illustrate the complexity of Holden’s philosophy, which, due to its abstract nature (“larger will,” “higher court,” “[W]ar is god,” life as a “dance” and war as a “game”), often demands explanation through parable, allegory or riddle. However, Holden’s philosophy suffers

little from the rebukes of riders such as Brown, black Jackson and Irving: these rhetorical opponents are at a distinct disadvantage during these debates because, unlike Holden, they fail to recognize that moral compunction has absolutely no value in their world, where only the violence of war offers the opportunity to grasp knowledge and power. Like a wizened sage, Holden patiently waits for his warriors to acknowledge their significance as participants in the act of war, where “considerations of equity and rectitude and moral right are rendered void and without warrant” (McCarthy 250), yet he fails to establish a truly spiritual, intellectual or philosophical brotherhood with any of them.

By speaking in riddles and parables, Holden not only promotes his philosophy but simultaneously manages to educate, challenge and ridicule his unwitting companions. This ridicule is not superfluous discourse; rather, it emphasizes the enormous philosophical and linguistic breach between the judge and his companions. Holden’s apparently derisive lecture on the geology of the landscape, for instance, is an example of how he capitalizes upon the gullibility of his companions. The narrator speaks of the judge

... holding an extemporary lecture in geology to a small gathering who nodded and spat.

A few would quote him scripture to confound his ordering up of eons out of the ancient chaos and other apostate supposings. The judge smiled.

Books lie, he said.

God dont lie.

No, said the judge. He does not. And these are his words.

He held up a chunk of rock.

He speaks in stones and trees, the bones of things.

The squatters in their rags nodded among themselves and were soon reckoning him correct, this man of learning, in all his speculations, and this the judge encouraged until

they were right proselytes of the new order whereupon he laughed at them for fools.

(McCarthy 116)

This incident reflects Holden's dark sense of humor and ability (as a deceiver) to manipulate his companions, but more importantly, it allows McCarthy to portray the vast incredulity and ignorance of the Glanton Gang, thus emphasizing the difficult challenge that Holden faces in educating his companions on their significance as warriors.

Even the most insightful members of the gang, such as Tobin, often fail to grasp the implications of the judge's lessons. Regardless of Holden's past behaviour with the gang (where he has proven to be a most beneficial member), the expriest remains apprehensive about sharing any type of bond or common goal with him, however obscure or abstract. In explaining to the kid how Holden initially saved the gang from a terrible fate at the hands of an Apache war party, Tobin claims that he "... thought the judge had been sent among us for a curse. And yet he proved me wrong. At the time he did. I'm of two minds again now" (McCarthy 131). Unlike the others, the expriest has a minor understanding of Holden's philosophy yet he remains wary when the judge claims that "every man is tabernacled in every other," for he senses a difference between his companions' motivations and those of the judge that he is unable to articulate.

One of Holden's most compelling and enigmatic lectures concerns the Anasazi, an ancient cave-dwelling society that, at one point in the distant past, mysteriously disappeared without a trace. In his lecture, he laments the loss of this society and the benefits that it offered to humanity. He laments the futility of its grand endeavors and emphasizes his admiration for the Anasazi's attempts to become masters of their world, to conquer nature and their environment, for these attempts precede his own endeavors to become suzerain of his own world. Holden states:

They are rumors and ghosts in this land and they are much revered. The tools, the art, the

buildings--these things stand in judgment on the latter races. Yet there is nothing for them to grapple with. The old ones are gone like phantoms and *the savages wander these canyons to the sound of an ancient laughter. In their crude huts they crouch in the darkness and listen to the fear seeping out of the rock. All progressions from a higher to a lower order are marked by ruins and mystery and a residue of nameless rage.* So. Here are the dead fathers. Their spirit is entombed in the stone. It lies upon the land with the same weight and the same ubiquity. *For whomever makes a shelter of reeds and hides has joined his spirit to their common destiny of creatures and he will subside back into the primal mud with scarcely a cry. But who builds in stone seeks to alter the structure of the universe and so it was with these masons however primitive their works may seem to us.* . . . If God meant to interfere in the degeneracy of mankind would he not have done so by now? . . . The way of the world is to bloom and to flower and die but in the affairs of men there is no waning and the noon of his expression signals the onset of night. His spirit is exhausted at the peak of its achievement. His meridian is at once his darkening and the evening of his day. (McCarthy 146, emphasis added)

As a warrior, Holden breaks the chain of his predestiny, alters the "larger will" that determines his fate and positions himself as inheritor of "the old ones" with their ambitious attempts to "alter the structure of the universe." He believes that only men such as he and the Anasazi strive to rise above a quagmire of ignorance and superstition--of "mystery and fear" (McCarthy 199)--that diminishes Man's ability to determine his own fate. Like the Anasazi, Holden exists alone among savages who "crouch in the darkness" of ignorance and delusion, despite a shared profession of making war and consistently participating in "the truest form of divination" (McCarthy 249).

McCarthy's narrator emphasizes this ignorance and the brute savagery of Glanton's

riders who, “[S]ave for their guns and buckles and a few pieces pieces of metal in the harnesses of [their] animals . . . [held] nothing . . . to suggest even the discovery of the wheel” (McCarthy 232), through vivid descriptions of their physical appearance. Even the hardened kid is jolted by his first glimpse of the outriders:

. . . and [the kid] saw one day a pack of vicious looking humans mounted on unshod indian ponies riding half drunk through the streets, bearded, barbarous, clad in the skins of animals stitched up with thews and armed with weapons of every description, revolvers of enormous weight and bowieknives the size of claymores and short twobarreled rifles with bores you could stick your thumbs in and the trappings of their horses fashioned out of human skin and their bridles woven up from human hair and decorated with human teeth and the riders wearing scapulars or necklaces of dried and blackened human ears and the horses rawlooking and wild in the eye and their teeth bared like feral dogs and riding also in the company a number of halfnaked savages reeling in the saddle, dangerous, filthy, brutal, the whole like a visitation from some heathen land where they and others like them fed on human flesh. (McCarthy 78)

As a “visitation from some heathen land,” Glanton’s riders maintain their brutal automaton status and an ignorance of their own significance within Holden’s disconcerting philosophy; thus, unlike himself or the Anasazi, the judge believes that they remain unable to initiate a journey down the road towards suzerainty over their world.

Despite the reaction that he often attains from these fierce companions during his “lectures,” Holden remains unflattered by the incredulity and respect exhibited by the scalp-hunters, for it stems from what he considers to be the ignorance of a “lower order” of human perception, a “lower order” of being (McCarthy 146). Praise from those who live in “mystery and fear” (McCarthy 199) is meaningless to one who has not only faced “horror in the round”

(McCarthy 331), but experienced the moment of epiphany in which war makes known its significance within the history of human conduct, and in the passage above, Holden delineates the fundamental difference between himself and his companions, who fail to “dictate the terms of [their] own fate” (McCarthy 199) because of their fear, their desire for mystery, and their superstition.

During a subsequent lecture, expounding on the marvels of paleontology (in an effort to explain the possible origins of an ancient femur bone discovered by the gang in the desert), Holden significantly alludes to his companions’ desire for mystery which, he contends, is pathetic compensation for their ignorance. He states:

There is no mystery to it, he said.

The recruits blinked dully.

Your heart’s desire is to be told some mystery. The mystery is that there is no mystery. (McCarthy 252)

Even with uncharacteristically straight-forward lessons such as this, the judge’s companions fail to grasp his meaning, and as the novel progresses their behaviour remains slightly inscrutable, almost subhuman--not because of their savagery, but because they remain sequestered from the morality of common society yet unable to grasp the significance of this detachment. They remain

[S]pectre horsemen. Pale with dust, anonymous in the crenellated heat. Above all else they appeared wholly at venture, primal, provisional, devoid of order. Like beings provoked out of absolute rock and set nameless at no remove from their own loomings to wander ravenous and doomed and mute as gorgons shambling the brutal wastes of Gondwanaland in a time before nomenclature was each and was all. (McCarthy 172)²¹

Despite the obvious power that they wield over those whom they choose to victimize, these

nomadic “gorgons” remain susceptible to a desire for mystery because it compensates for their inability to understand the true nature of war. Mystery, Holden believes, is the answer for the warrior who is too cowardly or foolish to accept that he alone, among all others, consistently subjects himself to the “truest form of divination” and consequently gains the ability to control his own destiny. He argues that the gang’s ignorance is unacceptable, and although he does not explicitly say so, he seems to align their ignorance with Hermetic thought, which thrives on “mystery and fear” (McCarthy 199). Indeed, if one chooses to view the Glanton Gang as Hermetics, the roots of Holden’s frustration, of his fear of isolation and a predestined fate, and the manner in which his companions represent these fears, reveal themselves.

The Glanton Gang and Hermetic Philosophy

According to historian and literary critic, Umberto Eco, Hermetic thought began with second century BCE cults dedicated to the Greek god, Hermes, who was “. . . the creator of writing, which is the art of evasion and dissimulation and a navigation that carries us to the end of all boundaries . . . where everything dissolves . . . and philosophy deludes and deceives” (*Pendulum* 156). During this era, the Roman Empire managed to stabilize its geographical borders, to temporarily abate its internal power struggles, and to eliminate social upheaval that had resulted from centuries of armed conflict. The influence of a single common language became extremely instrumental in uniting incredibly diverse groups of distinct cultures and resulted in a stabilization that was effective enough to discourage open revolt “such that no one [could] any longer hope to change it with any form of military or political operation” (Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* 29). As with all ancient multi-cultural societies, the extensive fusion of social and political issues affected religious perspectives, and gradually, the gods and goddesses of each culture began to assimilate, to adopt the identities of their former rivals and to share their functions.

This adaptive and inclusive society engendered the cults of Hermes and fostered the Hermes myth which, in general terms, expresses extreme “anthropomorphism and liberalism” (Morford 213), rejects personal identity and promotes illogical contradiction. Hermetics originally observed irreconcilable truths and incompatible doctrines between various belief systems and in a bold, yet perhaps questionable, cognitive leap, they began to assume that all truths were therefore allegorical. Truth became no longer dependent upon fact or upon one’s belief through experience. Gradually, however, the Hermetics realized the difficulties of defining truth solely through implication and responded by presupposing an ultimate cosmic truth that lay *concealed* within a quagmire of diverse languages and texts that constituted their society and reality.²² According to Eco, the Hermetics believe that “[s]ecret knowledge is deep knowledge because only what is lying under the surface can remain unknown for long” (*IO* 30); thus, the ultimate goal of the Hermetic became the discovery of elusive truth.

During the Renaissance, the introduction of a distinct emphasis upon the interrelation between heavenly and earthly existence occurred, and the nature of this parallel relationship--Earth/Heaven and text/hidden meaning--encouraged an infinitely correlative yet (according to Eco), questionable chain among all concepts, a universal sympathy. Misconstrued, this universal sympathy held the potential to keep Hermetics in a state of ignorance, of mystery and fear. In *The Limits of Interpretation*, Eco explains the perspective of the Renaissance Hermetic (one that, he contends, has carried on to present day):

... the interpretive habit which dominated Renaissance Hermeticism and which is based on the principles of universal analogy and sympathy, according to which every item of the furniture of the world is linked to every other element (or to many) of this sublunar world and to every element (or to many) of the superior world by means of similitudes or resemblances. (24)

Eco alleges that the Renaissance Hermetics (like Glanton's riders, who thrive on "similitudes and resemblances") exploited this notion of universal sympathy by urging one another to interpret with an eye towards discovering hidden esoteric secret meanings, to challenge the obvious and to seek out only the apparent truths that lay dormant within any given text or sign from nature. In his search for hidden truth, however, Eco maintains that the Hermetic generally replaced the value of communal agreement with that of universal sympathy because their respective communities did not often support their discoveries; accordingly, Hermetic existence became an infinite journey toward a hidden and unverified *logos* based upon highly subjective, and mysterious, connections.

Consequently, the Hermetics adopted a paradoxical logic and began to posit that each text implies a concealed cosmic truth about the universe, a concealed guarantee of certainty which, ultimately, cannot be discovered--ensuring a permanent state of mystery in their universe. This cosmic truth lay concealed within the infinite layers of meaning that every text contains and the search for this truth led them to engage in an infinite interpretive journey through all texts or experiences. Although they believed that the discovery of this cosmic truth was impossible, the Hermetics nevertheless continued to interpret the infinite layers of meaning contained within any given daily experience or any given text. They continued to nourish their desire for mystery. Eco believes that they discovered creative associations through inconstant logic and notably non-related material by relying upon subjectivity as the backbone of their interpretive methods and thriving on a desire for mystery, but that in their desperate search for cosmic truth, they readily magnified any consequential coincidences:

. . . where the coincidence of opposites triumphs, the principle of identity collapses.

Tout se tient.

As a consequence, interpretation is indefinite. . . . Hermetic thought

transforms the whole world theater into a linguistic phenomenon and at the same time denies language [or experience] any power of communication. (*IO* 32)

According to Eco, the significance of this highly subjective interpretive method is that there is no conclusive system of interpretive behaviour within the Hermetic community; the only existing interpretive rule is that there *are no* shared interpretive rules, no *communal* frame of reference. Similarly, Judge Holden notes that reality is unique to every individual (thus, in the case of *Blood Meridian*, preventing his companions from grasping the “larger will” of predestiny). The Hermetic reverses inductive scientific method by asserting a predetermined outcome from the outset and molding the facts around this outcome in order to prove its veracity. Hermetic interpretation is scientific deductive method with a predetermined hypothesis and no controlled environment. In short, the Hermetic uses every weapon in his/her arsenal--allegorical, metaphorical, phonetic--in order to make illogical connections based on a type of universal sympathy and journeys down a limitless road riddled with contradictory beliefs, antagonistic philosophical doctrines, irrelevant historical events, and opposing religious outlooks. Amid this mire of diversity, the “main feature of Hermetic drift seems to be the uncontrolled ability to shift from meaning to meaning, from similarity to similarity, from a connection to another” (Eco, *Limits* 26). In short, Eco alleges that the Hermetic “assumes that everything can recall everything else--provided he can isolate the right rhetorical connection” (*Limits* 27).

Holden contends that Glanton’s riders unwittingly seek to compensate for their ignorance by thriving on mystery because they are unable to grasp their significance as warriors who remain “tabernacled together.” Much like the Hermetic, they strive to understand or uncover some sort of mystery both within his abstract discourse and within their day to day experiences as nomadic scalp-hunters. The judge, of course, triggers this desire by offering only abstract explanations of his philosophy of war, by offering only enough information to trigger a sense of curiosity and

suspicion regarding the significance of war. This distinct teasing makes for an extremely rich and disturbing relationship because it exemplifies the judge's supremacy over the gang (despite his apparent subservience to Glanton) while illustrating his utterly manipulative skill in controlling those whom he refers to as the "ultimate practitioner[s]" of the "ultimate trade" (McCarthy 248).

In short, the strange relationship between the gang and the judge resembles that of master and puppets, between enlightened and Hermetic. In one scene, Holden illustrates the nature of this association when Glanton's horde encounters Sergeant Aguilar, a young Mexican soldier who is utterly unaware of the danger that he places himself and his troops within by confronting Glanton. After circumventing a confrontation with Aguilar, Holden responds to black Jackson's query regarding their exchange in Mexican:

What did you tell him Holden?

That shaking hands was not the custom in your land.

Before that, What did you say before that.

The judge smiled. *It is not necessary, he said, that the principals here be in possession of the facts concerning their case, for their acts will ultimately accommodate history with or without their understanding.* But it is consistent with notions of right principle that these facts--to the extent that they can be readily made to do so--should find a repository in the witness of some third party. . . . The company had listened to the judge in silence. A few smiled. A halfwitted killer from Missouri guffawed softly like an asthmatic. (McCarthy 85, emphasis added)

For the judge, the "principals" (namely the Glanton Gang) are never fully "in possession of the facts" regarding their role, their intrinsic nature or their significance as warriors because they fail to understand that they alone experience a unique "unity of existence" (McCarthy 249) with the

“larger will” (McCarthy 249) of predestiny. Consequently, they must “ultimately accommodate history” (McCarthy 85) without understanding it.

This ignorance marks the fundamental difference between Holden and his companions because it distinguishes the judge as the only potential suzerain among them. The gang’s lack of insight and periodic mindlessly violent conduct as “savages [that] wander these canyons to the sound of an ancient laughter” and “crouch in the darkness” of their own ignorance (McCarthy 146) remains their single common denominator. Like the misguided Hermetic, they seek out mystery in the desert and “listen to the fear seeping out of the rock” (McCarthy 146) in hopes that this mystery will enlighten them, but as the judge notes, “all progressions from a higher to a lower order are marked by ruins and mystery and a residue of nameless rage” (McCarthy 146), a rage such as that of these maniacally vicious hired mercenaries.

CONCLUSIONS

Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to present any analysis of Judge Holden's evil that is complete in itself, I believe that much of his imposing influence is directly attributable to his philosophy of war. His philosophy is a vastly individualistic perspective that aligns the wholesale slaughter of innocents with a radically glorified yet distorted legacy of the warrior. This philosophy is effectively and consistently validated throughout the novel, however, by the fierce scalp hunters and filibusters who justify their behaviour by exploiting manifest destiny ideology in the name of highly personal racist agendas or monetary profit (as opposed to a moral responsibility to "illuminate" colored non-American races). *Blood Meridian* remains, therefore, not a novel of hope or redemption, but rather one which presents a disconcertingly convincing argument which claims that evil and violence are intrinsic to human nature. After reading this chilling quasi-historical account, one may be forced to admit that we, as a race, cannot afford to ignore that which we are uncomfortable with, for, as Holden so effectively argues, ignorance consistently threatens to consume ambition.

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¹ In 1828, the Mexican government dispatched the Tèran Commission to survey the political situation in Texas. Alarmed by the Commission's reports about the increasing number of American settlers, the central government began political discussions regarding the prohibition of further American settlement or migration into Texas. By 1830, Mexico officially supported such prohibition, but to no avail, as American emigration continued to flourish. This inevitably resulted in military confrontations which escalated until 1836, when Texas officially declared independence.

² Various Northerners (including John Quincy Adams) viewed Texas annexation as part of a vast Southern scheme to extend slavery towards the Pacific Ocean. Consequently, they made a strong (and successful) effort to initially block annexation in 1836. In addition, various racist Southern groups opposed Texas annexation as it would imply U.S. citizenship to the colored Mexican peoples currently residing there.

³ Annexation was actually initiated by President John Tyler, who believed that it would repair his diminishing political credibility in the South. In 1843, Tyler began promoting the cause and, urged on by a powerful consortium of Southern business men and political advisors, he presented a treaty to the U.S. Senate in April, 1844. This treaty, however, was promptly rejected. Polk subsequently made the annexation a primary issue in his electoral campaign by claiming that Texas had originally been a part of the Louisiana purchase, but had been wrongfully bequeathed to Spain in 1819 by then Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams. On December 29, 1845, Polk officially signed the act that made Texas a full member of the Union.

⁴ There was a distinct Whig ideological opposition towards the Democrat policy of war with Mexico and implicitly considering Mexico as a potentially annexable United State. On February 11, 1847, for example, Thomas Corwin, a Whig orator from Ohio, addressed the Senate and voiced an undercurrent of conservative opinion. Corwin condemned the war and any relation

between expansion and American destiny. Believing that America was entering a period of sectionalism which would ultimately require enormous compensation (not just in financial terms, but in social strife and human life) should America endeavor to annex any further land from Mexico, he stated:

Mr. President, it is a fearful responsibility we have assumed; engaged in flagrant, desolating war with a neighboring republic. . . . Every one can feel, if he will examine himself for a moment, what must have been the mingled emotions of pride, humiliation, and bitter indignation which raged in the bosoms of the Mexican people when they saw one of their fairest provinces torn from them by a revolution moved by foreign people. . . . With such a people . . . upon who the fierce barbarism of the old age have ingrafted the holy sentiments of patriotism of a later birth; with just such a people the pride of independence and the love of country combine to inflame and sublimate patriotic attachment into a feeling dearer than life, stronger than death . . . Why is it, sir, that we should be waging war for territory, for "room"? Why should we be so weak or wicked as to offer this idle apology for ravaging a neighboring republic? (qtd. in Graebner: 160-168)

⁵ Although politically unsanctioned, this practice would diminish only with the devastating onslaught of the Civil War. Until that point, however, illegal raids into foreign territories such as northern Mexico, Cuba, Nicaragua and Lower California captured the imagination of many "young American" opportunists eager to profit from the political instability of America's neighbors.

⁶ In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy presents a most bizarre motivation for filibustering through the sickly Sproule. As the kid's apparent sole surviving companion following the slaughter of Captain White's filibustering expedition, Sproule admits that he has come out to the Texas-Mexico border area for his health, but clearly, he has engaged in the deadly profession of

filibustering without regard for the moral implications of his activities (McCarthy 58).

⁷ Following America's official independence, numerous opportunist filibusters took advantage of Spain's weakening western influence to encroach upon adjacent North American Spanish territories so that, by the mid 1820's, all that remained of the overseas Spanish Empire of the West were Puerto Rico and Cuba. In the early part of the century, animosity grew between emigrating Americans and overtly zealous Spanish officials (who often applied Spanish law quite harshly to informant Americans occupied with gathering information for Washington regarding potential land annexation of Spanish territories). Immediately following the War of 1812, American filibusters embarked upon various expeditions into western Spanish Territories including Texas, New Mexico, Amelia Island and East and West Florida (Martinez, *Border* 33-38).

⁸ During the period of *Blood Meridian*, there were a number of significant filibuster movements that impacted the political and social state of northern Mexico: in 1849, Jose Carvajal began a six year struggle to establish an independent Republic of Sierra Madre; in 1851, Charles de Pindray attempted to colonize Sonora (initially, with the aid of the Mexican government itself); James Kirker was a predominant filibuster and scalp hunter throughout the 1840's; in 1854, Gaston Raosset de Boulbon was executed after failing to colonize Sonora and liberate Guaymas; and in 1853, William Walker successfully invaded Sonora and Baja California, which he held until 1854, when he was tried and subsequently released by American authorities (Martinez, *Borderlands* 47).

⁹ During the negotiations leading to the end of the War of 1846-48, President Polk proposed that Mexico transfer certain areas along its unprotected northern borders to the US in the interests of the safety of the inhabitants of these isolated and exposed territories. Under the protection of the American government, inhabitants would no longer have to fear the repercussions of roving bands

of Apaches or Comanches (who had been emigrating through Northern Mexico for some time).

Although Mexico initially rejected this offer, it did concede that a forceful solution was needed to quell the violence, particularly in the state of Chihuahua. Consequently, an agreement was reached which stipulated that the Natives of any territories ceded to the US would not be, in any way, forced back into the remaining northern Mexican states. Furthermore, Article XI of the treaty stipulated that the U.S. would be held responsible for any raiding activities or parties originating north of the U.S.-Mexico border.

¹⁰ I suspect that McCarthy also has White decimated by the Comanche in order to heighten the invulnerability of the judge, whose first exploit with Glanton is to masterfully outwit a raiding party that has been threatening the lives of his powderless companions.

¹¹ According to historian J. Molinardo, the practice of scalp hunting originally began with that of taking the heads of enemies in ancient times for proof of victory ("The Scalp Industry" <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/HNS/Scalpin/heads.html>). By the settling of the New World by the Puritans of New England, scalping had become a new and somewhat unpolished practice among various Eastern tribes such as the Iroquois and the Muskogean bands. As the wars for influence in the New World raged, colonial powers such as the French, Dutch, Spanish and English often paid for the heads of Indian or White adversaries, but by the mid seventeenth century, this practice was reduced to the gathering of mere scalps. Gradually, it became common practice for European influences in North America to pay the Native tribes in money and arms to gather the scalps of known enemies and lawbreakers.

¹² Although reports vary, most historians of the Southwest agree that the scalp of a dead Indian male ranged from one hundred and fifty to two hundred pesos, with adult females bringing in upwards of two hundred pesos. Females were often of a higher value due to a distinct lack of female company on the rugged frontier.

¹³ By 1849, Chihuahua was paying two hundred pesos for each brave killed, two hundred and fifty pesos for each brave presented as a prisoner, and one hundred and fifty pesos for live women and children (Smith, "Scalp Hunt" 118). In 1850, Sonora's prices were minimally less.

¹⁴ With the regeneration of the scalp industry following the War of 1846-48, the practice of including an ear (a "receipt") with the scalp as a means of preventing fraud quickly became commonplace: without the benefit of an ear, it was often impossible to tell if the scalp was Mexican or Indian, especially since any given scalp could quickly be dried out in the Sun, stretched, and cut up into "many" scalps. Although regulatory committees were established to examine these scalps, they were often bought off so that the scalps of children were purchased as adults" (Molinardo, "The Scalp Industry").

¹⁵ The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines suzerain as a "feudal overlord; sovereign or state having some control over another State that is internally autonomous . . ."

¹⁶ This epigram reads as follows: Clark, who led last year's expedition to the Afar region of northern Ethiopia, and UC Berkeley colleague Tim D. Whitem also said that a reexamination of a 300, 000-year-old fossil skull found in the same region earlier shows evidence of having been scalped (June 13, 1982 *The Tuma Daily Sun*, taken from *Blood Meridian*)

¹⁷ The story of Balaam in Numbers involves a *satan* who is sent to punish Balaam for disobeying the word of God by trespassing, and the *satan* in the Book of Job makes a wager with God that the faithful Job is ultimately, corruptible. In both the Book of Job and the Book of Numbers, he is quite clearly referred to as another of Yahweh's subservient attendants; indeed, the Hebrew term was used to describe any angel whom God commanded as he saw fit, to test the Hebrews' faith by thwarting their plans or ambitions.

¹⁸ How art thou fallen from Heaven, O

Lucifer, son of the morning!

For thou hast said in thine heart, I will exalt my
 throne above the stars of God. I will sit
 also upon the mount of congregation,
 in the sides of the north
 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds
 I will be like unto most high (Isaiah 14:12)

¹⁹ McCarthy does, however, emphasize Holden's unique appearance. The judge, "bald as a stone" with "no brows to his eyes or lashed to them" and "serene and strangely childlike" (6) gradually transforms into "a great balden archimandrite" (273), an "alien minstrel[s]" (190), "an icon . . . that had better been left sleeping" (147), and a "surprisingly petite . . . pale . . . vast corpus" that resembles a "pale and bloated manatee surfaced in a bog" (167-68).

²⁰ Critic Bernard Schopen notes that McCarthy's narrative is steeped in "religious nuance, allusion, and language" (191), in a world where the

. . . scalp hunters transmorgify through the narrator's description into an eldritch world
 smoke and fire and darkness . . . elemental in both its dominance by the elements--earth,
 wind, water, fire--and its reduction of human existence to an elemental condition out of
 which arise the most fundamental, and fundamentally religious, questions. (191)

Schopen also contends that "the novel presents a vision of human existence reduced to a confrontation with a fundamental mystery for which religion has traditionally provided answers: human evil" (191). This is, I believe, not so much the confrontation of the narrator as that of the Glanton Gang and all who fail to grasp the implications of Holden's philosophy of war. Schopen is quite correct, however, in stating that the question of the nature of human evil remains unanswered, despite McCarthy's numerous references to various religions (Catholicism, Tarot, First Nations mythology). McCarthy refuses to authenticate the existence of any supernatural

deity, for to do so would be to provide the reader with a means with which to moralize and condemn the evil demonstrated by Glanton's Gang or the judge and consequently, to shatter the judge's philosophy of war so amply (and disconcertingly) validated by the Glanton Gang.

²¹ Gondwanaland is a hypothetical former supercontinent of the Southern Hemisphere (comprised of Africa, South America, most of peninsular India, the Antarctica and Australia). The name comes from the Gondwana region of central India and was coined by the Austrian geologist Eduard Suess. The theory that many continents were once joined in the geologic past, however, was initiated in 1912 by the German meteorologist, Alfred Wegener, who conceived of a massive land mass, Pangaea. Succeeding geologists divided Pangaea into Laurasia (to the north) and Gondwanaland (to the South). Gondwanaland is believed to have existed as much as 650 million years ago, with its gradual breakup some 130 million years ago; thus, this massive supercontinent existed for approximately 520 million years. The theory of Gondwanaland fell out of favor for many years in the early to mid twentieth century, but was eventually revived in the 1960's, when Wegener's hypothesis of continental drift was vindicated by new research into the nature of shifting ocean floors.

²² This elusive ultimate cosmic truth lays the seeds for the "mystery and fear" (McCarthy 199) that influence Glanton's riders.